

Gandhi, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

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Ambush belies ceasefire call

IN A SURPRISE attack suspected members of Egypt's largest militant Islamist organisation, Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, ambushed two police vehicles in Upper Egypt on Tuesday night, killing six people and wounding eight, reports **Khaled Dawoud**.

Five policemen and a civilian passerby were killed in the incident when unidentified gunmen opened fire on two police vehicles at a checkpoint in the town of Manflout, 300km south of Cairo. The eight injured included a police officer, five soldiers and two civilians. The attackers escaped in a stolen car after the shooting.

Police forces immediately sealed the town of Manflout and started a wide search operation, reportedly arresting more than 60 people.

Tuesday's attack was the worst since last month, when suspected members of Al-Gama'a shot dead six policemen in an ambush in the nearby province of Minya. It has also brought into question the validity of the July appeal by imprisoned leaders of Al-Gama'a calling for their followers to halt anti-government attacks.

The latest attack has come as a setback to a number of leading Islamist figures who have been attempting to convince the government to take the Gama'a ceasefire appeal *seriously*, and is evidence of deepening splits within the group.

(see p.3)

No Hamas link

NEW tests comparing explosives used in last month's double suicide bombing in Jerusalem with bomb materials discovered in a Bethlehem laboratory run by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) have failed to link the radical group with the attack, the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* said in a report carried by the AFP yesterday.

Israel had previously used the supposed link to press Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to crack down on Hamas militants as a condition for resuming peace negotiations and lifting sanctions imposed on Palestinians following the Jerusalem bombing.

According to Israeli radio, Ami Ayalon, head of Israel's domestic intelligence service, Shin Beth, told Arafat on Monday that Israel still believed the bombers probably came from abroad using forged British passports, but then received their bombs and instructions from Hamas militants in the West Bank or East Jerusalem.

Arafat refused to arrest some 200 militants, saying Israel had failed to provide specific evidence against them.

New victims

THIRTEEN Algerians had their throats slit over the past few days in a series of attacks against civilians by suspected Islamist extremists. Meanwhile, President Liamine Zeroual said the state would pursue with determination its struggle against Islamist "terrorism", Reuter reported.

In a 30-minute televised live speech on Tuesday on the occasion of Mujahid Day commemorating the war of independence won against France 35 years ago, Zeroual said that despite the violence Algeria will continue its democratic process and hold local elections on 23 October.

(see p.5)

Israel squeezes Lebanon

Israeli warplanes launched raids against eastern and southern Lebanon yesterday, a day after Hizbollah guerrillas fired Katyusha rockets on northern Israel

Israel retaliated yesterday for rocket attacks on its northern settlements by sending fighter-bombers to blast suspected guerrilla bases in Lebanon.

The raiding warplanes also bombed an electricity pylon in southern Lebanon, downing lines from the power plant at Jiyye, 25km south of Beirut. Hundreds of Lebanese homes and businesses were left without electricity.

Israel said the attack on the Lebanese economic installation — the first since April 1996 — was intended to punish Lebanon, which is still trying to recover from its 1975-1990 civil war.

A statement issued by the Israeli army in Jerusalem said: "Israeli planes also hit a high-tension line near the city of Sidon in order to make clear to the Lebanese government that it must start reining in Hizbollah and stop Hizbollah attacks on Israeli settlements and on the security zone."

The tit-for-tat exchanges began on Monday when a unit of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia fired artillery shells into the southern Lebanese port of Sidon, killing six people and wounding at least 35 others.

Hizbollah responded by firing towards the SLA attackers, and at least one battery of the Lebanese army reportedly joined in.

On Tuesday, Hizbollah gunners fired at least 45 rockets into northern Israel, resulting in minor injuries to three Israelis.

Israel blamed Monday's incident on a "rogue commander" and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday that his country did not seek any escalation of hostilities.

Israel alleged *that the target of yesterday's attacks* were suspected Hizbollah hideouts in eastern Lebanon. Four jets fired a total of six missiles at a Hizbollah base near the eastern village of Janta, about 65km east of Beirut. There were no immediate reports of guerrilla casualties. But Lebanese hospital officials said four civilians were treated after the attack.

Two children were injured when the roof of their house collapsed, and two adults suffered shock, the officials said.

In a third attack, an Israeli jet fired a missile into an orange grove near Toufahta, off the coastal highway between the southern ports of Sidon and Tyre. The Lebanese army maintains 155mm howitzer batteries in the area.

The Israeli statement said the target was an artillery battery of the Lebanese army which, it said, had joined in Monday's battles.

A five-nation commission monitoring the agreement that ended the 1996 incursion was scheduled to meet yesterday to discuss the increasing hostilities.

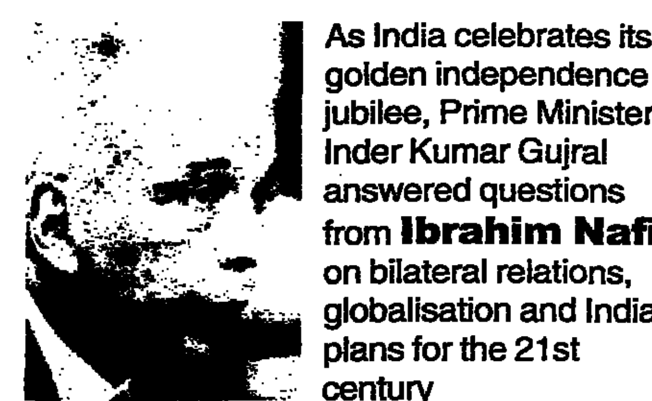
The agreement — whose implementation is monitored by representatives of the US, France, Lebanon, Israel and Syria — commits the warring parties to refrain from attacks on civilians.

Israel has occupied its so-called "security zone" in southern Lebanon since 1985. The zone is patrolled by about 1,500 Israeli soldiers and 2,500 members of the SLA militia.

Hizbollah has pledged to drive the Israelis and their lackeys out of Lebanon.

(see p.4)

'Growth with equity'





As India celebrates its golden independence jubilee, Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral answered questions from Ibrahim Nafie on bilateral relations, globalisation and India's plans for the 21st century

Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral believes the success of globalisation ultimately depends on the "extent to which developing countries progressively become part of the growing global economy and benefit in equal measure."

Gujral said developing countries "must also become locomotives in their own right, as some happily have, rather than just being hitched to the traditional locomotives, which are themselves seeking new sources of demand, growth and economic vitality."

The Indian leader noted that inter-dependence between countries has intensified as a result of the unprecedented mobility of goods, capital, services, technology, people and ideas. But he added that "this inter-dependence and the forces of globalisation that have caused it, need to be managed in the same way as good governments and corporations manage their affairs." Fair and equitable rules must be laid down, he said.

"The objective of the effective management of globalisation by national governments, developed and developing, and of international trade, monetary, financial and information systems should be to incrementally create a common and equal stake for all," Gujral declared.

He said he saw no threat posed by the new world order to the developing countries. "The inter-dependence of the affairs of globalisation will force North and South to cooperate and manage their affairs," Gujral said. "We see an era of developmental cooperation and a commitment towards that goal. It will be no use for a group of countries to fight amongst themselves rather than cooperate for the benefit of all. The developing countries should also adopt a courageous and confident profile towards globalisation."

On bilateral relations, Gujral said the policies of economic reform and liberalisation launched by Egypt and India "have opened new avenues for expanding and diversifying economic cooperation, thereby providing a greater role to the dynamic private sectors of both countries."

Recalling that Egypt and India are bound by "traditionally close and friendly ties characterised by immense goodwill and deep mutual understanding," Gujral said this friendship was strengthened by continuing high-level dialogue. An Indo-Egyptian Joint Commission that met in New Delhi last April identified new areas for cooperation, including agriculture and food security, bio-technology, energy, information and water resources. The two countries also agreed to double their bilateral trade volume by the year 2000.

India and Egypt, Gujral believes, share common concerns "over the contours of the emerging new world order, growing inequity between the developed and developing countries and the growing menace of international terrorism and drug-trafficking." The two countries worked together to revitalise the Non-Aligned Movement, reform the UN and realise global and comprehensive disarmament, he added.

India also maintained its traditional support for the Arab and Palestinian causes as well as the Middle East peace process, and remained concerned at the lack of progress towards peace.

Gujral said that conferring the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on President Hosni Mubarak "shows India's deep appreciation and recognition of the leading and significant role played by President Mubarak in Arab, regional and international affairs, in promoting international peace and security."

Mubarak, Gujral added, "has worked zealously towards consolidating Arab unity and played a decisive role in the convening of the Madrid peace conference and the subsequent launch of the Middle East peace process. He has always been in the forefront in promoting the vital interests of developing countries and in strengthening South-South cooperation."

As India stands on the threshold of the 21st century, it has set itself the target of achieving annual growth of seven per cent during the next five years and up to 8.5 per cent during the subsequent five.

Gujral vowed that "in our concern for economic growth, we shall not forget the interests of the poor and disadvantaged sections of our society," adding that "our goal is growth with equity."

"We shall give priority to agricultural and rural development to generate adequate productive employment and eradicate poverty," he said. "We are taking steps to ensure food and nutritional security for all, particularly the vulnerable sections of society," he said. "We shall provide basic minimum services such as safe drinking water, primary health care, universal primary education, shelter, etc to the rural poor in a time bound manner. Emphasis will be laid on ensuring environmental sustainability of the development process through social mobilisation and participation of people at all levels."

Looking back over the past five decades, Gujral said "there is much in our achievements in which we can take pride. There is no comparable experiment in the history of human development where nearly a billion people are living and striving together for better human conditions without being deprived of their fundamental human rights and freedoms," he said.

On Pakistan, Gujral said India seeks to establish a "relationship of trust, friendship and cooperation" with its Muslim neighbour.

"Our approach will continue to be constructive and we envision a broad-based relationship with Pakistan covering areas such as economic and trade relations, scientific and technical cooperation, people-to-people contacts and cultural relations," he said.

United in defiance

Brushing aside Israeli protests, Yasser Arafat is holding a national unity conference with opposition leaders, including Islamists

In a show of Palestinian unity, intended as a defiant message to Israel, Yasser Arafat hugged and kissed Islamist rivals in Gaza City yesterday at the beginning of a two-day dialogue with Hamas and other opposition groups.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has demanded that Arafat crush the Islamist Hamas movement, which he blames for the suicide bombings last month in West Jerusalem. But referring to Israel's demands that the Palestinian Authority arrest and disarm Hamas activists, Tayeb Abdel-Rehim, the Authority's secretary-general, told the conference: "We will not be the police for Israel."

In yesterday's conference, Arafat shared the dais at the Shawwa Centre in downtown Gaza City with speakers from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and smaller radical PLO factions. He hugged and kissed the speakers at the end of each address. And delivering the final speech, he said the Palestinians would stand united against an Israeli government that had imposed tough sanctions after the Jerusalem bombings, sealing off the West Bank and Gaza and withholding millions of dollars in tax refunds.

"We make concessions to no one, only to the Palestinian people," Arafat said angrily, from time to time jabbing his finger in the air to emphasise a point. Arafat suggested Israel's tough policies could trigger a new Palestinian uprising. "All options are open to us," he said, but quickly added that "we can't forget that the majority of the Palestinian people voted for peace."

But despite the calls for unity differences between Arafat and the Islamist groups quickly became apparent. Hamas speaker, Abdel-Aziz Rantisi, urged Arafat to abandon the peace accords already signed with Israel. Armed struggle should once again become an option, Rantisi said.

Arafat, though, has staked his political survival on peace and, despite his present bitterness, it appears unlikely that he will close the door on future negotiations with a more moderate Israeli government.

There was some concern in Hamas that Arafat had arranged the conference solely to strengthen his position and wait for a more convenient time to crush his rivals. "We hope that this dialogue becomes a continuous one, and not one that serves only political goals," Rantisi said.

In the spring of 1996, after four Hamas *suicide bombings, Arafat arrested* hundreds of Islamist militants and seized control of Hamas mosques.

Nabil Shaath, one of Arafat's top negotiators, said the meeting aimed to create "national unity and political consensus."

"This is a very important part of democracy. It is very necessary during this time of difficulty, a time when we are determined to save the peace process," Shaath told reporters.

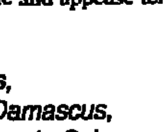
But Khalil Shkaki, head of the Palestinian Research Centre in Nablus, disagreed, questioning Arafat's motives. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Arafat is trying "to raise support at a time when he cannot deliver on major issues, such as clean government, freedom and democracy, and progress in the peace process." Arafat, Skhaki added, "is too weak and, by allying himself with the opposition, is trying to strengthen his position vis-à-vis Netanyahu."

Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, in an interview with the *Weekly*, also said that Arafat wants the national *dialogue to "serve tactical, short-sighted* objectives. He wants to show the Americans and Israelis that he can lead and unify all the Palestinian forces."

The Democratic Front, however, is seeking a "true and serious" dialogue in order to close ranks and unify all factions," Hawatmeh said. As an alternative to the Oslo Accords, he advocated negotiations on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

A *top aide to Netanyahu said Arafat's* hosting of the conference would make Israel less likely to ease the crippling sanctions it has imposed on the self-rule areas since the 30 July bombings.

"This is completely the opposite of what they should be doing," said David Bar-Illan, Netanyahu's media adviser. "Instead of dismantling the terrorist groups they are trying to placate them. You cannot placate and appease terrorist groups."



Wire dispatches,
***Atef Saqr** in Damascus,*
***Sherine Bahaa** in Cairo*

Cairo assures a desperate Arafat of its solidarity

Egypt announces a $10 million "emergency grant" to the Palestinian Authority, while Arafat, driven to desperation by Israeli and American pressure, is floating the idea of moving to Cairo. **Dina Ezzat** reports

Egypt pressed ahead with its efforts this week to ease the plight of the Palestinians, suffering from a blockade clamped on the self-rule territories since the 30 July Jerusalem bombings, and open the way for a resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

President Hosni Mubarak promised on Tuesday to give an "emergency grant" of $10 million to help the Palestinian Authority (PA) deal with the financial crisis resulting from the Israeli sanctions.

"A decision was taken on the matter to help the Palestinians cope with their financial problems," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Moussa denied that the decision was taken in response to the fierce criticism made by Arafat, on Monday, about the lack of solidarity shown by Arab states to the Palestinians. "Our [Egypt's] solidarity is assured, and the decision was taken two days ago before Arafat made his remarks," Moussa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The minister said that he hoped other Arab states would follow suit and provide as much assistance as possible to the Palestinian Authority "because the $30 million released by the Israelis is not enough."

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu agreed on Monday to release $30 million out of a total of $70 million owed to the PA by Israel in frozen taxes and customs, after the PA agreed to resume security cooperation with Israel.

"President Mubarak is making great efforts to ease the financial crisis by an emergency donation to help face the current difficult situation," Abu Redinah said.

According to a Palestinian source, Mubarak and Arafat discussed the situation on Tuesday by long-distance telephone.

Visiting Cairo this week were Marawan Kanafani, Arafat's spokesman, and Nabil Shaath, the PA's minister of planning and international cooperation. Both met Moussa for discussions on the current deadlock.

Kanafani delivered a message from Arafat about the "alarming and deteriorating situation" in the self-rule territories and expressing the Palestinian leader's concern over future cooperation with the Netanyahu government.

Some sources have suggested that Kanafani told Moussa that Arafat was considering leaving the Palestinian self-rule territories because he is worried about his own security and to demonstrate the strength of his anger over the way the Israeli government is going about the peace process. "We believe that Arafat is secure among his Palestinian people," Moussa told the *Weekly*. He added that Israel should halt its punitive measures and the pressures it is exerting on Arafat and the Palestinians because such tactics do nothing to improve confidence.

Shaath held additional consultations, focusing on "the future of the peace process in anticipation of the visit of Madeleine Albright."

"We hope that when she comes, she will directly hit the core of the political issue, which both the Palestinians and Egyptians agree has to do with the respect of the signed agreements and moving on to final status talks," he said.

Asked about the Palestinian position on the reported US proposal for jump-starting the final status negotiations, Shaath responded: "We cannot go to the final status talks without having the proper reference for negotiations. We cannot go to find that Netanyahu is laying claim to half of the West Bank and rejecting the right of refugees to return to their homeland." Egypt, Shaath added, is fully supportive of this position.

Shaath said Albright's visit should not be conditional on the Palestinians' accepting the Israeli demand to round up scores of Islamist militants.

"Security cooperation is stipulated in the interim agreements," he said. "According to the agreements, the PA should exchange information with the Israeli side and undertake the necessary measures to pre-empt any militant operations targeting Israel or the PA and to punish those involved," explained Shaath. This, he added, "does not [mean] that Israel should decide [for the PA] whom to arrest and expect us to carry out those arrests. It does not mean that Israel can tell us to shut down this or that organisation and expect us to comply. It certainly does not give Israel the right to prevent the PA from holding a national dialogue with all the Palestinian political forces, including the militant wings."

Shaath said that as part of its efforts to support the legitimate Palestinian demands it "will undertake certain measures by contacting a number of Arab and European states."

Another visitor to Cairo this week was Frank Wisner, former US ambassador to Egypt, who arrived amidst speculation that Albright's visit might be delayed until late September. Wisner came to Egypt "as a special envoy of the White House," according to the US Embassy in Cairo. No details of the visit were disclosed.

Meanwhile, Osama El-Baz, political adviser to President Mubarak, left for the Norwegian capital for what was rumoured — but later denied by El-Baz himself — to be an "Oslo III" secret channel of negotiations with Palestinian, Israeli and US officials.

In Oslo, El-Baz met with Norwegian Foreign Minister Bjoern Tore Godal to discuss the Middle East peace process, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry said. "They discussed all aspects of the on-going peace process, but no negotiations to have a new Oslo deal — an Oslo III — are taking place," said Ingvard Havnen, the ministry's spokesman.

According to Moussa, Cairo is going to contact all the concerned capitals to rally political and financial support for the achievement of the Palestinians' legitimate rights. But in the final analysis, he said, "The future of the peace process is in the hands of Arafat and Netanyahu. They have the answer and nobody else does."

Amer file closed again

The prosecutor-general has rejected a request to open a fresh investigation into the 1967 death of Field Marshal Abdel-Hakim Amer. **Amira Ibrahim** reviews the latest developments in the undying debate whether it was murder or suicide

As a controversy continues to rage on the pages of the Arabic-language press, Prosecutor-General Ragaa El-Arabi turned down last week a request to open a new investigation into the death of Field Marshal Abdel-Hakim Amer in September 1967. The official version was that Amer took his own life. But his brother, Hassan Amer, who requested the investigation, claimed that he was murdered.

Amer, who led the armed forces to defeat in the 1967 Middle East war, took poison on 13 September of the same year, after then President Gamal Abdel-Nasser sent officers to arrest him. He died on the following day while in custody. His brother, as well as historian Gamal Hammad, believe that he was forced to take the poison or was served a poisoned drink.

El-Arabi based his rejection of Hassan Amer's request on the grounds that he did not produce fresh material evidence to justify a new investigation. This, El-Arabi said, is a legal prerequisite if an incident that took place more than 10 years ago is to be probed afresh.

Hassan Amer made the request after Hammad published an article, on the 45th anniversary of the 23 July 1952 Revolution, insisting that Abdel-Hakim Amer was killed. If Amer had taken the poison at his home, as the official version states, he would have died within minutes but, in fact, he died 12 hours later, Hammad wrote. He pointed accusing fingers at Nasser's confidants who, he said, wanted Amer out of the political scene.

Hammad's credentials as a military historian were questioned, however. "Historians cannot be selective in approaching history," wrote journalist Adel Hammouda, the deputy chief-editor of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*. "They should not choose certain events to discuss and ignore others. We agree to debate that event [Amer's death] but we also request a political and historical investigation to determine those responsible for the 1967 defeat." Hammouda also demanded that if the dossier of Amer's death is to be opened, then other mysterious deaths should be investigated, such as the death of Field Marshal Ahmed Badawi and 13 other top officers in a helicopter crash in 1981.

This was not the first time that members of Amer's family had requested an investigation. They first did so in 1975. The government went ahead with the procedure at the time, but the investigation was dropped shortly afterwards.

Hammad said he came upon a report, prepared in 1975 by a toxicologist, asserting that Amer was served, or forced to take, a poisoned drink. "It was my duty to publish that article and ask for an investigation to uncover the truth for his family, the Egyptian people and history as well," he said.

Amin Heweidi, who served as defence minister and chief of General Intelligence under Nasser, objected to Hammad's allegations. "There is no need to revive certain memories for no useful purpose, at the expense of important matters," he said. "Re-asserting those claims at this time only serves to divert the people's attention from the collapsing peace process and the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories," Heweidi added.

Sami Sharaf, who was chief of Nasser's office, said the "same accusations are made every year on the same occasion. The prosecutor-general has turned down the request for an investigation and decided for the third time that the field marshal committed suicide. All parties should have confidence in the Egyptian judiciary."

But Hassan Amer stuck to his position. "I am positive he did not commit suicide. He was neither a coward nor an infidel to do that. If he wanted to take his own life, he would have done it immediately after the defeat, and not three months later."

Essam Hassouna who, as minister of justice at the time, supervised the investigation into Amer's death, referred to it in his memoirs simply as "death." He carefully avoided the word "suicide." "I still believe it could be murder and it could be suicide," Hassouna, a close friend of Amer's family, said. The political climate at the time may have prevented some witnesses from telling the truth, he added.

Amer was said to have made unsuccessful suicide attempts before his demise — the first during the 1956 war, the second on 8 June 1967, immediately after the defeat, and the third on 25 August 1967, while he was under house arrest.

Hassouna said: "I knew that something was going to happen either to Amer or to Nasser following the defeat. One of them had to disappear and it happened to be Amer."

Spy case judgement by month's end

A State Security Court will pass judgement on three Israeli-Arabs and an Egyptian accused of spying for the Mossad on 31 August. **Khaled Dawoud** reports


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Accused for spying for the Mossad, Azam and Ismail stand in the dock

After nearly four months of dramatic hearings, the trial of Azam Azam, an Israeli of Druze origin, and Emad Ismail, an Egyptian national, on charges of spying for Mossad is drawing to a close. Judge Moharram Darwish, presiding over the State Security Court, announced on Monday that he would hand down judgement in the case of the two men, along with the two Israeli women, also of Arab origin, who were standing trial in absentia, on 31 August.

According to legal sources, the four face up to life imprisonment if convicted of spying and criminal complicity to harm Egypt's political and economic interests.

For over eight hours on Sunday and Monday, Azam's lawyer, Farid El-Deeb, refuted the charges against the four defendants, insisting that there were political motives behind the case. Surprisingly, El-Deeb devoted the major part of his presentation to defending Ismail rather than his own client, Azam, because the prosecutor's case against the four was largely based on an 11-page alleged confession written by Ismail after his arrest.

Ismail had voluntarily informed the Egyptian intelligence service, a few days before his arrest, that Mossad agents were attempting to recruit him. However, the prosecutor maintained that Ismail had already agreed to cooperate with Mossad, and had received money for his services, before informing Egyptian intelligence.

Ismail's lawyer, Ahmed Bakr, in his presentation in June, said his client should be spared punishment because he had informed the authorities of the attempts of the other defendants to recruit him. He described Azam as a spy.

El-Deeb argued that Ismail had written the alleged confession under police pressure. He said Ismail was tortured, kept in solitary confinement for over 100 days and promised that he would be released if he signed the confession. El-Deeb noted that when interrogated by the prosecutor, he had denied involvement in spying activities and insisted that he had only signed the confession under duress. He provided the court with a report prepared by an "independent expert", who claimed that the style of writing indicated that the confession had been dictated and not written voluntarily. He also reminded Judge Darwish that the case dossier included a small piece of paper, the back of a cigarette box, on which Ismail had written that he had been tortured, denied water, food and bathing, and that the charges against him were faked.

El-Deeb told the court last month that the charges had been trumped up by Egyptian intelligence to discourage Egyptians from travelling to Israel in search of work. He also noted that the case had arisen at a time when Egyptian-Israeli relations had reached their lowest point following Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's rise to power 14 months ago.

The Egyptian government has been annoyed by the way Israeli officials and media approached Azam's case, demanding his immediate release. The Israeli press and media accused Egypt of violating human rights and harassing Israeli tourists in order to send a political message to Netanyahu. In response, President Hosni Mubarak insisted that Azam's case was in the hands of the judiciary, which would have the final word on his guilt or innocence.

Azam and Ismail were both employed at a joint Egyptian-Israeli owned textile factory in Tenth of Ramadan City. Ismail went to Israel for a one-month technical training course in February 1996. It was there that he met the two Israeli women, Zahra Greis and Mona Shawahneh. The main case against Azam is that he provided Ismail with women's underwear which, when washed, produced invisible ink which could be used for writing letters to Mossad.

El-Deeb, who is fond of using theatrics in his presentations, insisted that the four defendants were innocent. He painted the picture of a love story between Ismail and Greis, and said the two had wanted to get married. He also pointed out various "discrepancies" in the events cited by the prosecutors, alleging that they had put together unrelated events to forge a case against the four.

He also questioned a report prepared by the intelligence service on the chemical analysis of the underwear, on the grounds that any such report should not have been prepared by the prosecution side. An independent expert should have examined the underwear, he said, to determine whether it actually contained invisible ink. He also submitted to the court what he described as an independent report alleging that the intelligence service's chemical analysis of the underwear was "unscientific."

El-Deeb ridiculed the charge that Ismail provided Israeli intelligence with information on Egyptian industry and the number of factories and workers in the new industrial cities. He said Mossad did not need to hire a spy to get such information and provided the court with two huge volumes published by a local private company, Compass, listing the names and activities of all Egyptian companies. He also presented the court with a directory published by the Investment Authority on the new industrial cities, which also lists the names and activities of all factories operating there.

El-Deeb said Ismail was arrested a few days before Azam and news of his arrest was published by the opposition newspaper *Al-Arabi* on its front page. "If Azam were a Mossad agent, why didn't he escape? If he did not know [about Ismail's arrest], wouldn't the Mossad know and ask its agent to leave the country immediately?" El-Deeb asked the court.

Mass murder in intensive care

Police in Alexandria are trying to establish whether the mysterious deaths of up to 18 intensive care patients in a government hospital were the work of their nurse

Press reports that a 25-year-old nurse in an Alexandria hospital was arrested on suspicion of deliberately killing between five and 18 patients over six months sent shock waves through the nation this week. Aida Noureddin, who had won the title of model nurse at Alexandria University Hospital but is now dubbed the "devil" by some Arabic-language newspapers, denied the charge.

Noureddin, who works at the neurology department's intensive care unit, was arrested last week after brain surgeon Adel Eissa informed Alexandria prosecutors of recurring and unexplainable deaths in that ward while she was serving night duty. According to another report, Noureddin, following the mysterious deaths in the neurology department, was transferred to the emergency ward. Shortly afterwards, another mysterious death occurred there, and she was arrested.

According to earlier reports, Noureddin confessed to police interrogators that she had injected "tens" of intensive care patients, between June and December last year, with a drug called "flaxtinil." An overdose of this drug, which is a muscle relaxant, could kill a person by inducing the lungs to cease breathing. The reports put the number of those allegedly killed by Noureddin between five and 18.

There were conflicting reports about her motives. One report suggested that she injected the patients with the drug because she did not want to be disturbed by their demands, preferring to sleep on her night duty. Another report claimed that she sought to prove her efficiency. After injecting the patients with the drug, causing their condition to deteriorate, she would hurry to the rescue — but sometimes too late.

A third report alleged that she was having an affair with a doctor in the neurology department who later jilted her. Seeking revenge, she decided to kill the patients entrusted to his care, the report said. But the alleged lover denied having any relations with the nurse.

During interrogation, Noureddin jumped, or fell, from the third floor of the police station and was taken to hospital after breaking a leg. Reports suggested that she attempted suicide but, in press interviews, she denied this, insisting that she fell by accident.

In these interviews, Noureddin also denied that she killed anybody. She said she, as well as other nurses, worked under the close supervision of superiors who would have immediately discovered any attempt at wrong-doing. She also said that only her superiors have access to the "flaxtinil" drug. If any amount was missing, it would have been discovered and reported, she added.

"I have been working in this intensive care ward for the past seven years. Why is this happening now?" she asked.

Noureddin said that she made the earlier confession to police interrogators after she was tortured. She said she was blindfolded, slapped and beaten at the police station. "They forced me to sign the confession and when they beat me harder, I ran and stood on a chair that was near the window. I fell by accident," she said.

"I am innocent and I was not involved in any [love] affairs. All that was said about me is not true," she wailed.

But authorities do not believe her. She was ordered remanded in custody at a prison hospital for 45 days.

In another press interview, Noureddin said she was a "scapegoat" in conflicts between the powers-that-be at the neurology department. She also accused doctors at the department of negligence and prescribing the wrong medication to their patients.

A surprise twist faced the police investigation. Police were unable to have access to the dossiers of the intensive care patients, with hospital officials claiming that they had been disposed of. The standard practice is to dispose of such files five years after being closed.

Minister files complaint against *Al-Shaab*

Prosecution officials are questioning five journalists at the opposition *Al-Shaab* newspaper in connection with a libel complaint filed by Interior Minister El-Alfi. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, under public pressure to respond to a fierce and unprecedented campaign by *Al-Shaab* newspaper, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, this week filed libel complaints against the newspaper's editor, Magdi Hussein, and four other reporters. The newspaper, in a series of articles over the past few weeks, claimed that El-Alfi was guilty of financial malpractice and influence-peddling.

Interior Ministry sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the minister had submitted a detailed memorandum to the prosecutor-general's office and the cabinet, refuting all the allegations made by *Al-Shaab*.

Hussein escalated the newspaper's campaign last Friday, by publishing four pages of what he said were documents showing that El-Alfi had sold a villa for LE600,000 to former public company manager Abdel-Wahab El-Habak in 1996. El-Alfi had allegedly bought the villa three years earlier for a mere LE88,000. In return, Hussein charged, El-Alfi promised to help El-Habak avoid trial on corruption charges. El-Habak, however, was later tried and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and fined LE180 million for making millions of pounds in illegal profits.

One of the documents published by *Al-Shaab* purported to be a list of papers seized at El-Habak's home following his arrest last September. Included on the list were contracts and cheques allegedly paid by El-Habak to El-Alfi.

"These documents are fake," said an Interior Ministry source. "In our memorandum, we responded to every single accusation, corroborating our response with documents."

El-Alfi said *Al-Shaab*'s campaign was part of a plot by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood to discredit him following the success of his security forces in confronting Islamist militants. He added that Hussein bore a grudge because he had been sentenced to a total of four years imprisonment in four separate lawsuits brought by El-Alfi's son, Alaa, after the newspaper accused him of using his father's influence to accumulate wealth illegally.

On Tuesday, the prosecutor's office summoned Hoda Mekkawi, a journalist, and *Al-Shaab*'s cartoonist, Essam El-Sharkawi, for questioning. Yesterday was the turn of the newspaper's top reporter, Salah Bedeiwi, who is known for his fiery articles. Today, Hamdi El-Shami, another journalist, is expected to be questioned, followed by Hussein on Sunday.

Sources at the prosecutor's office said that after the questioning of the five journalists has been completed, El-Alfi will be questioned. It will be the first time that an interior minister has been questioned about his financial integrity since the 1952 Revolution.

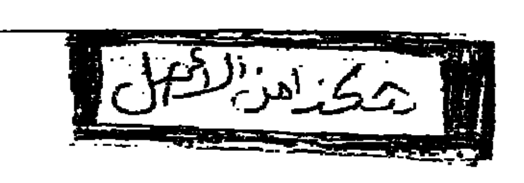
Hussein wrote in an editorial on Tuesday that he was happy that he has finally managed to bring the minister to file a complaint with the prosecution authorities. "This way, I will be able to present the documents I have to the prosecutor and prove to the whole world that we have a corrupt interior minister. Now we stand as adversaries," Hussein told the *Weekly*.

He said he had lost the lawsuits brought against him by Alaa El-Alfi because the latter was considered by the court as an ordinary citizen and not a public official whose integrity can be legitimately questioned according to Egyptian law.

Al-Shaab's main headlines on Tuesday were also devoted to corruption allegations against El-Alfi, who, the newspaper claimed, had illicitly accumulated a fortune even larger than El-Habak's. The newspaper also accused other top Interior Ministry officials of using their offices to conduct business deals and pressuring individuals accused of corruption to give up part of their property to them.

Several columnists have urged El-Alfi to respond to *Al-Shaab*'s campaign in order to protect the government's reputation. Ibrahim Se'eda, chief editor of *Akhbar El-Yom*, wrote last Saturday that El-Alfi and Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri should respond. He also called upon the Press Syndicate's council to meet and discuss whether the newspaper's campaign was in accordance with the journalists' code of ethics.

El-Alfi, in his memorandum to the prosecutor, said that *Al-Shaab* had slandered the Interior Ministry and its officials by describing them as "thugs and drug traffickers." He also accused the newspaper of spreading false information by charging that the ministry had been penetrated by the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad.



Negligence kills in Heliopolis


photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid

A fire, blamed on an electrical fault, swept through a shopping mall in Heliopolis last Thursday night, killing three people and injuring dozens of others. Shaden Shehab reports

Prosecutor-General Raga'a El-Arabi has ordered the demolition of the three top floors of the nine-storey Horreya Mall in the up-market suburb of Heliopolis after the shopping centre was gutted by a fire that left three people dead and dozens of others injured.

Black smoke began billowing out of the building around 9pm last Thursday after power cables burst, sending shards of glass flying onto the street below. There was panic inside the mall as the crowd stampeded in the darkness *amid* cries and screams.

About 40 fire engines rushed to the scene. Firemen broke windows to rescue shoppers and workers trapped inside, while distraught relatives milled around the glass-littered streets, searching for family members. The blaze was extinguished about six hours later, at 3.30am.

Three people were killed in the blaze — Sherif Badr, 30, Michael Abdallah, 7, and an unidentified person. The number of injured was given as 283, but by Saturday only 88 people, including two firemen, remained in hospital, suffering from lacerations, smoke inhalation or broken bones after jumping out of windows. Material losses were estimated at LE50 million.

President Hosni Mubarak ordered that the injured be given free medical treatment at the Nasser Institute Hospital. He also requested an urgent report from Cairo Governor Abdel-Rehim Shehata on conditions at several shopping malls in the capital. Mubarak specifically asked that fire-extinguishing devices and electricity systems in these shopping centres be checked to make sure they are functioning properly.

The Horreya Mall was packed with an estimated 1,000 shoppers, diners and cinema-goers when the disaster struck. The mall is built over a 1,000-square metre area and is 32 metres high. It includes 82 shops and boutiques, several cafés and restaurants and two cinemas.

Police are investigating the cause of the blaze, and a technical committee has been established to assist in the inquiry. Meanwhile, police have arrested the mall's electrical engineer, Saad Abdel-Alim, for suspected negligence.

The blaze was initially blamed on a power overload, which caused the poorly-maintained electrical cables to burst. A preliminary investigation has shown that the blaze began in the central electricity control room on the first floor. Investigators said the fire then raged out of control because the extinguishing equipment did not work. The alarm system also failed to work efficiently — going on and off intermittently during the fire. And a reserve power generator did not activate, leaving the mall and those trapped inside in complete darkness. It is thought that the lack of ventilation shafts helped increase the number of people who suffered from symptoms of suffocation.

Although it is suspected that there were design faults in the building, Rashida El-Sawahli, head of the Housing Department in Heliopolis, testified that the mall's construction licence was in order. She added that the approval of the Civil Defence Department — to the effect that the building's design met all its requirements — had been obtained before the licence was granted.

Prosecutor-General Raga'a El-Arabi later ordered the demolition of the three top floors, where the two cinemas are located, because cracks had appeared on the walls, columns and ceilings. He also ordered that the building be kept empty and under police guard.

But he deferred the actual demolition pending a report from a construction engineering committee that he formed to determine whether there were any structural faults in the building.

Khaled Abdel-Razek, who works in a sixth floor cafeteria, said: "It was around 9pm and the mall was very crowded because it was Thursday. Suddenly, the electricity went off and there was a strong smell of burning. People began screaming hysterically. Some fainted and had to be carried. I and others dashed to break the windows to get some air.

"These were moments of real terror. We tried to reach the stairs but the door leading to them was locked. We were trapped. We had to stay put until the firemen came to our rescue. I still shiver when I remember the screams of the people who were trying to find a way out of the darkness and the smoke."

Karim Anwar recalled that "suddenly the lights went off and we were told that there was a fire. I tried to escape but couldn't because of the smoke and darkness. I was stuck for almost an hour until a fireman rescued me."

Norhan Tammam, 7, said from her hospital bed: "I was at the mall with my mother and sister to buy clothes. Suddenly it went dark and there was heavy smoke and people running and screaming. The next thing I knew, I was in hospital." Her mother and sister are also hospitalised.

Student Mohamed Abdel-Aziz was standing outside the mall with friends when the blaze broke out. "I saw the mall plunged into darkness and heard people screaming. I hurried inside with a friend and we managed to rescue four people. But the firemen stopped us from going inside again."

Buildings in Heliopolis have been the scene of several tragedies during the past few years. The October 1992 earthquake caused a 15-storey building on Al-Hegaz Street to collapse, killing 67 people. On 28 January 1993, a six-storey building, also on Al-Hegaz Street, came down, killing 20 people. On 26 October 1996, 65 people were killed in the collapse of a 12-storey building. The disasters were blamed on construction defects.

Cease-fire call gains credibility

Confusion continues to surround both the cease-fire call issued by jailed Islamist leaders and the government's response. Dina Ezzat reports

Amidst much talk about an anticipated cease-fire between the government and the militants of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and Jihad, the daily *Al-Ahram* reported on Monday that the security forces had killed 13 "terrorists" and arrested 100 others in security swoops in the southern Governorate of El-Minya.

The targeted militants, the newspaper said, were allegedly involved in an attack on the Europa Hotel along the Pyramids Road in April 1996, in which 18 tourists were killed. They were also responsible for an attack against a church in Abu Qurqas last March in which 12 Copts were killed, as well as other attacks on railway trains, vehicles and police forces, the newspaper added.

The report followed the publication of a press interview, in which an Al-leader reiterated the group's call for a reconciliation with the government. "We want to extend a hand to the government in order to find a solution to the problems of extremists," said Salah Hashem in the interview with *Al-Ahram*.

Hashem, head of Al-Gama'a's chapter in the southern province of Sohag, is the only free member of its *Majlis Al-Shura*, or consultative council.

Analysts believe that the publication of the report about the killing and arrest of militants immediately after the publication of the Hashem interview indicates that the government is not prepared for a truce and will continue to hound the militants until they are finished off.

Islamist lawyer Montasser El-Zayyat, who often acts as unofficial spokesman for the militants, did not dispute this theory. "To start with, there were no killings or arrests this week," El-Zayyat told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The men who were said to have been killed earlier in the week were actually killed in May and their killing was reported by security officials in June."

The fact that the government decided to re-announce the killings and arrests, El-Zayyat said, "means that it is telling the militant groups that although it is open to suggestions of reconciliation, it is going to act very aggressively if it chooses to."

Leaders of the militant groups do not expect the government to respond immediately to their call, El-Zayyat added.

"They know that the government is not prepared to look as if it were being dragged into a deal or compromise with the groups, particularly since the truce requires the government to take some steps in the direction of releasing some members of these groups who have been in custody without being charged," he said. "The leaders who made the call for a cease-fire and those who supported it know that it is going to take a while, but they also know that it is in the government's interest to accept the peace deal."

In an article published by *Al-Ahram* on Tuesday, Fahmi Howeidi, a writer on Islamic affairs and a moderate Islamist, argued that there would be no harm done if the government decided to consider the cease-fire call with an open mind. "What is it that would prevent an effort to test the seriousness of this call?" asked Howeidi. He said that if the initiative "worked out, then we would be the winners, and if it did not, then we would have nothing to lose."

In Howeidi's view, there are two factors behind the initiative of the militant leaders. The first, "which is absolutely obvious," is that the security forces now have the upper hand in the confrontation with the militants. The second reason, "which is possible but not 100 per cent certain," is that the leaders of these groups have reconsidered their line of action and realised that they made a mistake by using violence and that violence had done them much harm.

According to sources close to the militant groups, efforts are under way to build up support for the cease-fire call that was first issued on 5 July by a group of defendants standing trial before a military court on behalf of their jailed leaders. A task force of several groups of senior, but not leading, members of Al-Gama'a and Jihad are now touring the various provinces to try and relay the cease-fire message to fugitive militants. The task force, dubbed by militants *Lagnat Al-Hokama'a*, or the committee of wise men, will also seek to contact a few media and intellectual figures in an effort to get the message across to public opinion. At this stage, the task force has no instructions from the militant leaders to seek contact with security officials.

"Mediation is not on the agenda," El-Zayyat said. The principal target at this stage, he added, is to prove to officials that the cease-fire call was made in good faith.

Indeed, a group of militants standing trial before a military court asked the presiding judge last Saturday for permission to read out a thank-you note from their jailed leaders to Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi for his initial positive reaction to the cease-fire initiative.

El-Alfi had said he welcomed any effort to end the violence but indicated, in the same breath, that the security forces would continue the war against the militants.

Expatriate leaders of Al-Gama'a continued to have misgivings, however. Yasser El-Serri, who lives in Britain after he was sentenced to death in absentia, said that for him and other leaders living in exile "this truce call is ambiguous. There are a lot of question marks. Hidden fingers are moving it."

Serri said that he was in favour of an end to hostilities, but only "within the framework of a comprehensive and just solution." He sharply criticised the reconciliation call made by Hashem and insisted that "security must be for both parties."

Ayman El-Zawahri, the Jihad leader who also lives in Europe, shares the position taken by Serri.

Commented El-Zayyat: "The expatriates need to make sure that the young members of the groups will benefit from the cease-fire. And I think that at some point soon we will have evidence of this."

Dubious statement claims fire

A statement allegedly signed by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya has taken responsibility for the fire at the Horeya shopping mall. But, as Khaled Dawoud reports, sources close to the group insist the statement is fake

An Islamist lawyer speaking on behalf of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya has denied that the group sent a statement, received by news agencies on Monday, claiming responsibility for last Thursday's blaze at the Horeya Mall in Heliopolis. Initial police investigations have shown that the fire was caused by an electrical fault.

"Yesterday," read the undated statement, "we inflicted great damage on the regime, and the Heliopolis shopping centre incident is *merely a guiding lesson* to those who say that we are on our way to being eliminated. Elimination will be the destiny of the enemies of Islam."

According to experts, the statement was different from previous statements sent to news organisations by the group over the past few years. Past statements usually carried a date, according to both the Muslim and Western calendars, and were signed in the name of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya only and not "Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya in Muslim Egypt."

The statement said the Gama'a would "continue the struggle against the enemies of God everywhere," and called upon "fighters in the prisons and cells of the Interior Ministry not to give up and to believe that God is merciful... Recently, our brothers killed the Jews in Palestine [a reference to the suicide bombings in West Jerusalem], and today we are hitting their agents in Egypt."

If the statement is authentic, it would mark a radical shift in the Gama'a's strategy *since it began its* campaign of violence in 1992 to establish a strict Islamic state. Although Gama'a militants have targeted Copts and killed other civilians caught in the crossfire of their gunfights with police in the past, they have never attacked crowded places such as shopping centres.

Islamist lawyer Montasser El-Zayyat, who was himself detained in 1994 for allegedly acting as a Gama'a spokesman, denied that the statement was authentic. "This statement aims to distort the Gama'a image. The mall was frequented by innocent civilians, including women and children, and the Gama'a cannot attack such places," he said.

He indicated that whoever issued the statement wanted to thwart current efforts to convince the government to take seriously the cease-fire offer made by the jailed leaders of the Gama'a in early July. The offer was opposed by the group's expatriate *leaders, indicating a division* within Gama'a ranks.

However, Zayyat told the French Press Agency AFP on Tuesday that "Gama'a leaders abroad confirmed to me that they did not send this statement despite their opposition to the appeal to stop violence."

An Interior Ministry official said the statement was "not worthy of comment." He refused to say whether it would be taken seriously by the security authorities.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

SLA bombs Sidon

Israeli-backed militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), has bombarded Sidon for the first time since Israel's last major offensive in April 1996. Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

Shells rained Monday on population centres in south Lebanon's largest port city of Sidon, 35km south of Beirut, killing six civilians and injuring more than 30. Lebanon responded with a complaint to the five-nation truce-monitoring group formed following the Israeli offensive against Lebanon in April last year. Israel said it was not behind the attack and blamed its client SLA militia.

A day after the attack, Katyusha rockets slammed into northern Israel injuring one person and damaging a building. No one has claimed responsibility so far.

The indiscriminate bombardment caught Sidon and the nation by surprise as it came with no previous warnings. It is believed to be in retaliation against a roadside bomb attack near Jezzine in the occupied zone in south Lebanon. Three Lebanese teenagers were killed in the bomb attack. Israel blamed Hizbollah for the roadside bombing but the resistance group denied any responsibility. "We denounce this new crime which was carried out by Israel," Hizbollah said in a statement.

The Israeli army said its allied militia, under the command of pro-Israeli militia leader Antoine Lahd, was behind the attack on Sidon. The said militia keeps a contingent in the Jezzine area, just outside the occupied zone, and the youngsters killed in the roadside bombing near Jezzine were the children of an SLA commander, according to Israel radio and television. The Israeli army, however, tried to distance itself from the Sidon shelling. An Israeli military source said that the "SLA is backed by Israel but the people who fired [on Sidon] are not backed by Israel".

Hizbollah blamed Israel for the aggressions in Sidon and promised revenge. "This new massacre was ordered by the Israeli government because the militia cannot take such a decision without Israeli approval," the group said. "We must speak in the language the Israeli enemy understands and it is not possible to keep silent about what happened. The enemy must be given a deeply bitter message," Nabil Kawouk, Hizbollah's chief official in south Lebanon said.

The shelling caused panic in the city. "Shells are landing outside our building. I saw a man die in front of my eyes when a shell landed next to him," a Sidon resident told the *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview minutes after the first round of shells were fired. A total of 16 shells landed in the city centre and its suburbs.

Doctors at Sidon's hospital said they were unable to identify some of the bodies. "We do not have complete bodies. We have heads and severed limbs. People are coming to identify them but no one has been able to do so yet," doctors were quoted as saying.

Retaliation came only hours after the Sidon attack, with Katyusha rockets slamming into Marjayoun and Jezzine, both SLA strongholds. Pro-Israeli sources said the attacks on Jezzine resulted in the death of a 60-year-old civilian and the wounding of two women. No party claimed responsibility.

The Lebanese army also bombarded the Lahd-led militia positions in south Lebanon. The army's engagement in the conflict is unusual, as it usually stays out of the fighting in the south, except to launch anti-aircraft fire at Israeli warplanes and helicopters.

The aggression in Sidon followed months of roadside bombings in mainly-Christian Jezzine, for which Israel blamed Hizbollah.

Hizbollah claimed the accusation was untrue. "The enemy is planting the bombs in a bid to undermine the steadfastness of the people there and drive a wedge between them and the resistance," a Hizbollah statement said.

Over the past few months, Israeli allied forces withdrew from positions in areas near Jezzine. Last Tuesday, pro-Israeli militiamen pulled out from a position in Saydoun, five kilometres south-west of Jezzine. Only two days later, however, the militia were back patrolling the area and shelling surrounding fields. The message to the Lebanese government and resistance was that the region remains under SLA control.

Four months ago, the militia left a position in nearby Kfar Falous and a month later it abandoned its post in Bisri. But the two outposts remain within the militia's range of fire. And it seems the Saydoun pullout is not any different.

Lebanese political circles see the withdrawals as a potential trap. Israel has been trying to tempt Lebanon into accepting the "Jezzine First" step of a "Lebanon First" peace plan. Israel, according to this plan, would pull out gradually from south Lebanon in return for certain security guarantees. Later, it would turn its attention to peace with Syria. Both Syria and Lebanon, have rejected the idea, fearing that it would undermine their negotiating position. Lebanese House Speaker Nabih Berri said that Lebanon rejects any deal with Israel that does not involve a full withdrawal from all Lebanese territories.

Lebanese officials are downplaying the possibility of a wide-scale confrontation following the Sidon attack. But the flare-up has done little to defuse tensions in the region or to revive hopes that touring dignitaries, including US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright who plans to visit the Middle East in the coming weeks, would be able to breathe life into the flagging peace process.



A Palestinian man helps set up a tent compound in the middle of Arab East Jerusalem during a sit-in protest by Palestinians who cannot find housing. Israel has in the past month demolished dozens of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank which were built without permits *(photo: AFP)*

Jordan dialogue off to shaky start

The first round of talks between the government and the opposition parties came to a disappointing end in Jordan. Lola Keilani reports from Amman

Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood group, the country's largest opposition party, blamed the failure of their first round of dialogue with the government last Sunday on what they described as the "high-handed approach" of Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Salam Al-Majali. Al-Majali kept the opposition delegation waiting for 90 minutes before shaking hands with them and apologising for being "too busy" to meet them. The delegation said the talks in the meantime were held with deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour.

In July, the Islamist movement in Jordan announced its decision to boycott the upcoming general elections as an expression of protest against the new cabinet's foreign and domestic policies.

The latest meeting brought together the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and the small opposition party Al-Mustaqbal. During their meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Ensour, they discussed "the importance of dialogue in enhancing the democratisation process," said the Brotherhood's general supervisor, Abdul-Majid Znibate. Znibate added that "during the meeting no details were discussed nor did a so-called dialogue on the current conditions take place."

Znibate explained that the Muslim Brotherhood initiated the boycott movement to express its opposition to certain government policies, mainly the 1994 peace treaty with Israel and the normalisation of ties with it; the press and publication law recently approved by the government; the one-person-one-vote system which opposition parties see as an attempt to decrease their representation in parliament. Additionally, the boycott is meant to protest the worsening economic conditions resulting from the implementation of agreements with the International Monetary Fund and the hegemony of the executive authority over both the legislative and judicial authorities.

According to Jordanian political analysts, previous governments always kept the channels of communication open with the minority parties. Former Prime Minister Muder Badran consulted with the Islamists without alienating the leftists or the centrists. Former Prime Minister Zeid Bin Shaker also opened a dialogue with various political parties when he introduced the draft laws on political parties and the press and publication laws. But the majority in the current parliament does not take into account any minority objections as was the practice in previous parliaments.

A number of independent Jordanian analysts, including former Minister of Information Ibrahim Izzedin, believe that the king's involvement will force the two sides to reach a common ground. "I do not believe that the boycott will continue," said Izzedin. He added that the king's calls for dialogue last week saved both sides' time and effort in the initiation of the dialogue.

In a public rally in Ma'an, the southern city known for the 1989 price riots, the king had appealed for the two sides to sit together and talk. He praised the Jordanian Islamic movement highly and dismissed fears of the economic domination of the country by Israel. But he stressed that the Israeli peace treaty with Jordan, approved by both houses of parliament, was not up for negotiation.

A previous meeting, also initiated by the king, took place at the Royal Court between Znibate and Royal Court Chief Awn Khasawnch. The meeting signaled Hussein's interest in seeing an end to the current crisis.

Abdul-Latif Arabyiat, acting secretary-general of the IAF, who represented his party during the meeting with Ensour, said that although the IAF is committed to the boycott, "we are hopeful that we won't have to continue the boycott after we complete our discussion." Arabyiat added that "we are now waiting for a call from Prime Minister Majali to begin dialogue which we expect will start some time this week."

But the success of such a dialogue, in which opposition parties expect Majali to participate, hinges mainly on the genuine keenness of the government to see the opposition parties participate in the 4 November elections.

Meanwhile, the call for a boycott of the elections is gaining ground as independent political personalities announced their support for the move on Monday. A statement signed by 80 prominent figures, including two former prime ministers, said they believed the coming elections would not be free and fair. Yet, several Jordanian analysts believe that the Muslim Brotherhood will be the losers because the government has intensified its efforts to register voters, especially among young people, by taking out paid advertisements in newspapers and on television.

Many tribal leaders and independent activists see the boycott as a chance for them to win seats in the new parliament. A number of rich Palestinian businessmen who settled in Jordan following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait are also keen to run for election, betting on the polarising vote of the Palestinians who form more than 50 per cent of the population.

Furthermore, the active role of women's associations in this election is expected to counterbalance the boycott of the opposition political parties. All indications are that women's committees are planning an organised campaign to win as many seats as possible.

Burying the Saharan hatchet

At an African summit in Tripoli, Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi sought alternative ways to meet the challenge of international sanctions imposed on Libya and mend fences with former African foes, writes Gamal Nkrumah

Last week, Chadian President Idriss Deby, Malian President Alpha Omar Konare, Niger's President Ibrahim Bare Mainassara and President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso flew to Tripoli to attend an African regional summit presided over by the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Topping the agenda was the creation of closer political, military and economic ties between Libya and its southern neighbours, and strengthening cooperation between the oil-rich but sanction-humbled Libyan economy and the four impoverished West African countries.

In a rare spurt of optimism, the five leaders vowed to end past differences. Now that Libya's backing of insurgents in Mali, Niger and Chad, and its border disputes with the latter two states are over, the five leaders were happy to bury the hatchet. The three nations had long accused Libya of meddling in their domestic affairs. Tripoli supported ethnic Tuareg secessionists in northern Mali and Niger, while it backed rival Chadian warlords at different times during the Chadian civil war. Libya's 1,124km border with Chad remained out of bounds for several years because of a border dispute over the Aouzou Strip — a desolate territory rich in uranium and oil reserves. Similarly, Libya's 800km border with Niger was closed for over 10 years because of the enmity between Gaddafi and Niger's former military ruler Senyi Kuntche.

Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad are among the poorest countries in Africa. The four West African countries occupy the vast and arid Sahelian and Saharan zones. Rain is erratic in places and seldom falls in others. Agricultural potential is limited in all except Mali, where the Niger River's inland delta provides a guaranteed source of fresh water and fish. The four countries have important and largely undeveloped mineral resources such as gold and uranium. With funding and appropriate technology, the West African countries also have substantial animal husbandry potential.

During the meeting, Gaddafi reiterated his scathing condemnation of colonialism and imperialism and called into question the frontiers inherited from Africa's colonial past. He denounced a map that appeared recently in the French monthly *Jeune Afrique*, depicting Africa divided along tribal and ethnic lines, as a neo-colonial plot. "Why the renewed Western obsession with tribalism and ethnicity in Africa? Western arms fuel tribal wars and ethnic conflict in Africa. There is evidence that the West wants to redraw the map of Africa dividing Africans north and south of the Sahara," Gaddafi warned. He added that the Muslims of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan and the Horn of Africa are ethnically related to Arabs and are part of the wider Arab-Islamic cultural sphere.

Niger's Mainassara told reporters in Tripoli that he envisioned a "military as well as an economic union" between Libya and its four Sahelian African neighbours. Libya proposed that its four land-locked southern neighbours use port facilities along Libya's 2,000km Mediterranean coastline. "Our coastlines are your coastlines," Gaddafi assured his African visitors. They, in turn, proclaimed their support for their host on the question of sanctions and for "Libya's historic struggle against the forces of arrogance and aggression" — Gaddafi's euphemism for Western powers.

The US, Britain and France got the UN Security Council to impose a five-year air and arms embargo against Libya in April 1992 because of alleged Libyan involvement in the 1988 mid-air bombing of an American airliner over the Scottish village of Lockerbie. Tripoli's refusal to extradite two Libyan nationals accused of planting the bomb which left 270 people dead has earned it the enmity of the West. There have been previous unsuccessful efforts by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement to find a just solution to the international political impasse concerning Lockerbie. Libya feels that the accused Libyans will not receive a fair trial in the West. The four African leaders pledged to submit a joint proposal at the next OAU summit meeting on the Lockerbie affair.

The four West African countries have close ties with Libya's Western adversaries, but they also benefit from Libya's largesse. Libyan Islamic cultural centres, mosques and Arabic language schools abound in the four predominantly Muslim countries. But among the issues discussed were ways of combating the growing influence of Islamist groups in the five countries.

Following a military parade and oath-taking ceremony of 2,500 cadets after the closing session of the summit, the Libyan leader delivered a strongly-worded tirade against racists, tribalists, and religious zealots. He lambasted the United States and the United Nations Security Council which has repeatedly refused to lift the embargo against Libya. Gaddafi warned that the UN is "under the thumb" of the US.

Tripoli has stepped up its widely-publicised violations of the air embargo to draw attention to the suffering of the Libyan people because of the sanctions. In utter disregard for the air embargo, Gaddafi went on a West African tour last June that took him to Nigeria and Niger. He also sent Libyan airliners carrying Muslim pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this month, a defiant Gaddafi warned that Libya would no longer abide by the UN sanctions after the UN Security Council renewed the air embargo without a 15-member consensus. Libya has tried in vain to break out of the economic blockade and its far-reaching economic effects. At the OAU summit meeting in Harare last July, African leaders vowed to "devise means of alleviating the suffering of the Libyan people." In much the same vein, the African presidents meeting in Tripoli urged UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to set up a commission to inquire into the effects of the sanctions on the Libyan people. In their final communiqué, the African leaders meeting in Tripoli called on the international community to "support any effort aimed at bringing a rapid and definitive solution to the [Lockerbie] affair."

Thanks to revenues from Libya's oil exports, the Libyan economy has fared far better than expected, but the international sanctions still hit hard. The embargo has had a disasterous effect on health services in particular. Medicine and certain foodstuffs are in short supply, and there are now determined efforts by the Libyan authorities to boost Libya's food supplies. Mali, Niger and Chad are exporters of livestock and plans are under way to replace frozen meat imported from Europe, Australia and New Zealand with livestock from Libya's southern neighbours.

More than ambition to save Algeria

Algeria's first coalition government's programme, ambitious as it may seem, needs more than fiery words to be implemented. Amira Howeidy examines the challenges facing the new cabinet

In a test of Algeria's new democracy, embodied in its first multi-party parliament elected on 5 June, the 380-seat assembly wound up nearly a week of scathing debate to vote on the government's ambitious three-year agenda last Sunday.

The 1997-2000 plan proposes to create 1.2 million jobs, build 800,000 homes, and raise Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annual growth from an average of four per cent to seven per cent. It also envisages cutting Algeria's foreign debt to $26 billion by the year 2000 from the $32 billion it reached at the end of 1996.

Although the house adopted the plan by 245 votes to 72, with 26 abstaining, opposition parties and members of the coalition government from the former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) and Hamas, now officially known as the Movement for Peaceful Algeria (MPA), openly criticised the programme outlined by Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyehia. They claimed that it lacked "credible figures" to support the government's ambitious targets. Yet, in the overall voting on Ouyehia's programme, MPs rallied to keep the government intact.

Ouyehia's three-party coalition cabinet is dominated by Zeroual's supporters and includes seven Hamas members and a similar number of FLN figures. Hamas or MPA is the only Islamic party in the fractious government coalition.

"We voted for the new programme, but that does not mean that we reversed our stance (opposing the government)," MPA official Ahmed El-Dan told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview from Algiers. El-Dan said the programme was not open for discussion among the coalition partners before it came up for voting in parliament. "We were excluded [from the outlining of the programme] and this means that the one-party rule mentality still prevails," he said. El-Dan objected to what he labelled as Ouyehia's "negative" stance when he turned down requests by more than 200 deputies to introduce amendments to his programme.

He said the MPA voted for Ouyehia's programme only to maintain the fragile unity among the coalition partners at a time when secular parties in Algeria were strongly opposed to their participation in government.

After casting his vote of assent, MPA parliamentary spokesman Abdel-Razaq Meqri listed his party's reservations about the plans during the session which was broadcast live on the state-run television.

He voiced strong opposition to Ouyehia's plans to re-schedule Algeria's foreign debt payments, the speedy pace of agricultural land privatisation and the "vagueness" of plans to promote Islam and Arabism.

The vote on the government's new agenda came amid renewed reports of massacres allegedly carried out by members of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Algeria's most violent Islamist militant group. Violence broke out after the Algerian army cancelled the results of the first round of parliament elections in early 1991, when it became clear that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was heading for a landslide victory. More than 60,000 people have been killed since then, including an estimated 700 since the new government took office in June. According to independent sources, around 440 people have been killed in the past four weeks.

Workers' Party leader Louisa Hanoun called for an open investigation into the recent massacres of civilians in remote villages around the capital which were blamed on suspected Islamist militants. She said that she had documents which allegedly "linked terrorism with the privatisation of agricultural land."

But Ouyehia insisted that his government was determined to stamp out the armed groups and that it now had the upper hand in the fight with the militants.

"Terrorism, which has suffered a defeat at the hands of the nationalist forces, was the result of a wide-ranging conspiracy against the nation," he said in his address to parliament.

"Awareness and collective mobilisation against terrorism are imperative," he said.

Algeria observers, however, questioned whether Ouyehia's programme could be carried out without a significant improvement in security in the devastated North African country.

Expressing "legitimate optimism" about economic progress, Ouyehia admitted that ordinary Algerians were probably not feeling the benefit of economic successes such as lower inflation rates and higher money reserves.

But experts say such developments are too limited. Unemployment stands at over 30 per cent, and is closer to 70 per cent among those under the age of 30, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) figures. Meanwhile, government-built housing projects are hardly enough to meet even a fraction of what is actually needed.

Although the government has accepted IMF and World Bank requirements to reform the economy, the privatisation of hundreds of poorly-managed state businesses has hardly begun.

An additional worry is that next year Algeria has to pay $4.5 billion in debt service. This amount represents more than one-third of Algeria's entire GDP. The country's infrastructure has also been ravaged by 30 years of centralised socialist mismanagement.

To most economists, the Algerian government is doing the right thing, but not fast enough to keep the lid on the pot.

Hard times for Turkish Islamists

Turkey's Islamists are up in arms about a new education reform bill recently approved by parliament. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports



A Turkish riot policeman stands atop a water cannon vehicle trying to disperse Islamist demonstrators in central Istanbul last Friday *(photo: AFP)*

In what was considered a victory for the secular government of Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, the Turkish parliament approved this week a controversial bill curtailing religious education. Officials of the main opposition Islamist Welfare Party (RP) said, however, that they "will not drop the issue" and will continue fighting to get the bill annulled by appealing to the Constitutional Court, the country's highest tribunal.

Using strong words reflecting the anger in his pro-Islamic camp, RP leader and former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan characterised those who supported the bill as "mentally ill."

Sevket Kazan, a leading RP figure, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the party was bent on opposing the new law. "The Refah will wait until the new education law is published in the Official Gazette and establish a special commission in the RP to work out the details of taking this law to the Constitutional Court. We hope that the court will first order freezing the law and then its total annulment," Kazan said.

The bill, which has split the country along secularist and religious lines, was passed by parliament in the early hours of Saturday with a margin of 35 votes. The law increases the compulsory primary education period from five years to eight. Before the law was approved, Turkish youngsters had the choice of either joining state-run secondary schools where they receive a secular education, or enroll in religious schools, known as *imam hatip*, after finishing their five years of primary education.

Now, all students will receive a secular education for eight years before they will be given the freedom to attend religious schools. The secular establishment hopes that eight years of such an education will help in countering the growing Islamist influence in Turkey. The new law also limited the availability of Qur'anic courses to after-school hours and summer vacation.

Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz referred to the eight-year education law as "a gift" to the people of Turkey.

In a move designed to consolidate the secularist camp's victory, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel ratified the new law only hours after it was passed. For doing so, Demirel came under fire from RP figures who claimed that "he had not studied the text of the [education] law as much as he studied the text of the bill on casinos submitted by the former ruling coalition of the Refah and Tansu Ciller's True Path Party [for example]." The bill on casinos aimed at curbing their activities. "The president should have shown the same sensitivity to this bill that he showed to other bills," a Refah deputy told reporters on Monday.

Despite their apparent victory, members of the secular camp were dismayed by parliament's performance during the vote on the education bill. In their view, the deputies did not show enough enthusiasm in defending the bill. They further pointed to the slight majority with which it won the vote. "The difference between the 'yes' and 'no' votes was only 35. If this education reform was the sine qua non of moving away from the trap of traditionalism and bringing [the education system] closer to Western civilisation, one would expect that the lawmakers of Turkey would show more enthusiasm," Gengiz Cendar of the Secular daily *Sabbah* told the *Weekly*.

Commenting on the education bill, True Path Party (DYP) chairman and former Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller described it as "outdated". She added that the compulsory eight years of education would turn pupils into "tin soldiers". "It will put a straitjacket on Turkey's educational system and push the country to the edge of darkness," said Ciller in an address to a meeting organised by the pro-Islamic Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association.

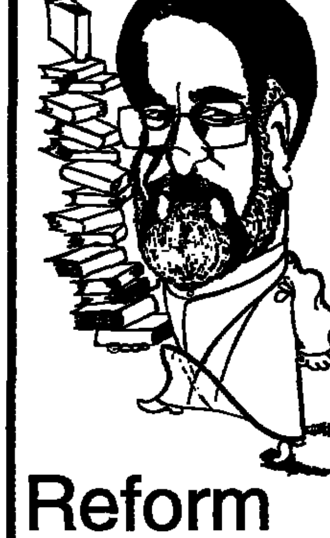
Ciller's DYP was in a coalition with an RP-led government until June of this year. The government collapsed after a series of resignations by deputies from both parties and eventually lost the narrow majority in parliament that kept it in office.

Shortly after his designation as premier, Yilmaz promised speedy measures against the fundamentalists and took up the educational reform issue, thereby raising the ire of the Islamists.

The religious schools were set up four decades ago to train Muslim clerics, but over time they turned into schools for mass education. Now they cater to more than 500,000 students. Independent observers feel these schools should be reformed and integrated into the mainstream educational system instead of being closed down altogether.

Turkish newspapers quoted Erbakan as saying that his party would come to power "in the not too distant future" and then would put twice as many students into religious schools.

Several demonstrations by thousands of Islamist and Refah members were held in various Turkish cities after the bill was passed in parliament. More than 150 people were detained and several demonstrators were badly beaten by the police. Yilmaz vowed not to tolerate any violent opposition and said that the rule of law would prevail in Turkey.



Reform without reformers?

Iran's parliament approved President Mohamed Khatami's cabinet appointments this week. But, writes Safa Haeri, no radical changes should be expected

The first thing which springs to mind when going through the names of the ministers proposed by the recently-elected Iranian President Khatami and approved by the Majlis, or parliament, on Wednesday, is the lack of intellectuals, technocrats and experts.

Hardly a day passes without the leaders of the Islamic Republic, particularly the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, boasting about "hundreds of thousands of the finest brains, technocrats and experts in all fields that Islam had produced in Iran".

But the bitter fact is that after 18 years of Islamisation, the regime has produced only a few dozen "brains".

Of the list of 22 ministers presented to the Majlis on Tuesday, after two months of effort and consultation, only 12 were new. The rest have served during the last 16 years in various governments led by the so-called leftist Mir Hosein Musawi or the supposedly "moderate" Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The 12 new faces, though not much known to the general public, are from a similar mould. They are all part of the same system; having worked in different state-sponsored "organs" such as the Revolutionary Guards or government-affiliated foundations.

Sources close to the new president said that over the past two months Khatami had approached many of his friends, offering them ministerial posts and encouraging them to join him in the "reform" plan, but all of them had turned down his offer.

"Some told him outright that they would prefer to work as a taxi driver rather than cooperate with a regime they don't consider fit to rule over Iran. Others demanded such drastic conditions that even Khatami could not accept, let alone the men above him," said one such source, who was speaking from Tehran on condition of anonymity.

The naked truth is that in a country of more than 60 million people, with world-class technocrats and experts, few of calibre make up the higher echelon of government.

The question which arises is: Is it with such people — most of whom have been involved in Iran's past history of assassination, imprisonment and torture of those opposed to the regime — that Khatami proposes to bring reform? Is it with such people that the new president wants to form a "modern, open minded" government?

According to one of Khatami's close friends, the answer is negative. "All these men you see in Khatami's government, including the newcomers, have been approved by the leaders for they are our brothers. The Majlis has received orders not to be harsh with them."

Oil flows but not food

Despite the resumption of Iraq's oil exports, aspects of the "oil-for-food" deal still incense Iraqi officials

Tankers laden with Iraqi oil left the Turkish port of Ceyhan hours after Iraq resumed its oil exports on Friday. More tankers docked at the Al-Bakr terminal in southern Iraq began to fill up on Iraq's *single export* commodity. Food expected by Iraq in return for its oil sales will take a few months to arrive. According to UN officials, 30 consignments of food and medicine, already purchased by Iraq, will not arrive in that country until December, due to complicated monitoring and approval procedures.

The "oil-for-food" formula, approved by the Security Council in December 1996, allows Iraq to export $2 billion worth of oil every six months and use the revenues to finance imports of food and medicine. The first six months ended in June and the deal was renewed for a second six-month period following further negotiations between Iraq and UN officials, but snags appeared.

Baghdad requested that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan approve a 680-page plan for the distribution of the purchased material. The plan calls for speeding up humanitarian shipments, increasing the number of UN inspection agents and entry points and avoiding delays in approving contracts.

Some, but not all, of Iraqi demands have been met. The Security Council has approved 12 contracts for Iraqi oil purchases, and a new entry point for imports has been opened at Al-Tenf, on Iraq's border with Syria. According to the new plan, Iraq is allowed to buy $906 million in food and $210 million in medicine. The rest of the oil revenues could be used to repair infrastructure destroyed during the Gulf War.

But Baghdad is still embroiled in a dispute with the Security Council concerning whether the second six-month period started at the beginning of June or last week, when oil exports resumed. The Security Council insists that the agreement went into effect in June and, therefore, ends in December, whether or not Iraq manages to export $2 billion worth of oil until then. Iraqi officials are opposed to such reasoning, countering that the agreement should take effect this month when oil exports were actually resumed. But they appear to be going along with the UN position. The Iraqis now say that they have no choice but to increase their exports to levels unprecedented since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait in order to make up for the lost two months.

Another dispute between Iraq and the UN over the oil-for-food formula stems from what the Iraqis perceive as "American and British monopoly on the contracts signed with Baghdad," says Hassan Abu Taleb, a political expert at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. The first customer for Iraqi oil was the American Bay Oil Company, despite the troubled relations between the two countries, Abu Taleb points out.

Iraq insists that it should have full freedom in selecting the companies it is to trade with. It has refused to renew oil purchasing contracts with some British, Dutch and Japanese oil companies in retaliation against their support of UN sanctions, while renewing those of Russian firms.

In an interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, Iraq's Arab League representative Nabil Nejm, blamed the two-month delay in resuming oil exports on the United States and UK representatives at the Security Council. Iraq continues to have some reservations on the process of contracting with foreign companies. Last week, Baghdad accused the United States of blocking the approval of a contract with France to import 120 ambulance vehicles.

Ambassador Nejm denied, however, that Iraq's oil contracts were based on the nationality of the companies. "The contracts are signed with companies, not with states, and they are absolutely *based on the quality of products these companies* will supply to Iraq, not on political factors." But Nejm admitted a certain preference for Arab traders. "If Iraq had to choose between signing a contract with an Arab company or a foreign one, given that they both have equally good commodities, the Arab companies would definitely be given priority."

Nejm is particularly dismayed with the amount of oil Iraq is allowed to sell; the $2 billion per six months. "After subtracting the various costs and taxes, Iraq is left with *only $1.3 billion to* buy food and medicine. This is not an amount that would meet the needs of a population that was subjected to seven years of sanctions."

Reported by ***Rania El-Razzaz***

Fifty and free

The independence of India and Pakistan 50 years ago this month was a momentous happening. The demise of the British Raj heralded a new era for the colonised people of Africa and Asia. Barely a decade after the ousting of the British from the subcontinent, a majority of colonised peoples had won their independence too. *Al-Ahram Weekly* marks a historic turning point



Dandi March sculptured by D P Roy Choudhury depicting Gandhi leading a group of Satyagrahis, his followers, during the freedom struggle

Nehru got it right

Mohamed Ouda recollects the vision of independent India — democratic, socialist, secular and non-aligned

When the sun set on the British Raj, the Indian nationalist movement, led by the Congress Party of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharal Nehru, crystallised a vision of independent India. The British ruled India in a very undemocratic manner. The leaders of the newly independent nation vowed to make it democratic, come what may.

India formed the basis of the British Empire. When the Raj fell, the British were chased out of the rest of the empire. The British were not driven out of India by force of arms. They were forced out by a peaceful civil disobedience campaign skilfully orchestrated by Gandhi. As colonialists, the British were cruel. They divided India into "Princely India", ruled by a coterie of nizams and sultans and maharajas, and "British India" which was ruled directly by the British. "Princely India" consisted of 500 principalities — some very large and others tiny. Some of these rulers were incredibly rich — the Nizam of Hyderabad was the richest man in the world at the time. Muslim rulers governed predominantly Hindu subjects, as in Hyderabad. Hindu maharajas ruled over Muslims as in Kashmir. The seeds of hatred were sowed by British colonialism. A policy of divide and rule was perfected in the Raj.

The British sucked India dry. They ruthlessly exploited the vast subcontinent. They looted the fabulous wealth of the land. The Raj was the epitome of evil — differences between rich and poor were immense, discrimination against Indians was institutionalised, social injustice was endemic, and communal strife rife.

Upon gaining independence, India's nationalist leaders liquidated British India and Princely India. They instituted parliamentary democracy and created the democratic structures that all of us in the Third World are proud of today. But, unlike in the two-party Westminster system, the Congress Party was the dominant and guiding force.

India is not a country, it is a subcontinent. India has six major religions, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Sikhism and Jainism. At independence, India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. There were many Indians who wanted to see India become a Hindu state. Gandhi and Nehru resisted the formation of a religious state for the Hindus.

Pakistanis said that they would have a Muslim state because Muslims constitute a "nation". But, there were Muslim Indians who rejected this idea and remained in India. So independent India had to create a secular state which guaranteed the freedom and full civil rights of all its religious groups. By and large India has succeeded in doing so.

But the challenges to Indian secularism are great. Indian secularism faces a particularly difficult test in Kashmir. Kashmir was the symbol and pride of Indian secularism: a Muslim state that chose to join India rather than Pakistan. Over the past 50 years, Kashmir was transformed from an ideal secular state into one ravaged by Islamist, religious fanatics and fundamentalists.



Nehru and Nasser (left) and Mubarak and Indira Gandhi

The imperialist powers carved up Asia and Africa between themselves. Nehru knew that independent India could not survive without the liberation of other Asian and African countries. He looked to Egypt in particular and the Arabs generally as allies in the fight against imperialism. The "Middle East" was originally a British idiom and a Western notion. "West Asia" was Nehru's preferred term for the region because he saw it as an integral part of Asia.

In the 1950s the Republicans came to power in the United States and John Foster Dulles became secretary of state. He set a very dangerous precedent by launching a foreign policy called "From Containment to Liberation". It was the liberation of "captive nations" which meant encircling Russia with strategic pacts and then advancing to "liberate the captive nations" of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The plan was to get Russia to disintegrate from within.

So Nehru called on African and Asian countries to mobilise and face the American threat to world peace. Non-alignment is India's greatest achievement. The partnership of India and Egypt played a great role in fostering non-alignment. Dulles came to Egypt and tried to get Gamal Abdel-Nasser to join the anti-Soviet Middle East pact. He also flew to India to try and persuade Nehru to join an anti-Soviet Southeast Asian pact. The Non-Aligned Movement created a zone of peace and was able to check Dulles' designs and dealt a severe blow to adventurous Republicanism. The Americans never forgave Nehru and Nasser.

Socialism, too, was a vital part of Nehru's vision. Socialism for Nehru was a means to rehabilitate the hundreds of millions of Indians who had been exploited by centuries of British colonialism and to redress the injustices of the past. But, Indian socialism was very different from Soviet socialism. The Soviet experiment was rejected. In Nehru's vision, India was to have socialism along with all the trappings of viable democratic structures. The Birlas and the Tatas are real economic monopolies and empires that dominate the Indian economy. Today many of India's business leaders are trying to blame Nehru's socialism for India's social and economic ills. That is very wrong.

After 50 years of independence, the prime minister of India warned that the danger of corruption threatens the destruction of India from within. This is actually regrettable. They are trying to blame Nehru's socialism. But liberalisation, not socialism, is the glaring failure. The Congress Party fought the recent elections on the programme of liberalisation, and it suffered its most humiliating defeat ever. The Congress Party was dethroned by the Indian voter because liberalisation created the Indian super rich class and the poor are getting poorer. The super rich and the middle class in India are minorities in contemporary India. India was never a closed economy because it always had a vibrant private sector. Nehru called on the Soviet or socialist camp to support India's public sector and he called on the West to do business with India's private sector. There was never a command economy in India.

After 50 years, how democratic is India? How socialist is India? How secular is India and how non-aligned is India today? We must judge the independence of India according to the criteria of Nehru's vision. Indian democracy has survived. Parliamentary democracy is thriving in India today. The greatest achievement is the Indian voter. He commits mistakes and corrects them. The Indian voter is the real guarantor of Indian democracy.

The writer is an Egyptian political analyst and veteran journalist. He is the author of several books on India.

Pushing for tiger status

Gamal Nkrumah interviews India's Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, the key architect of the country's radical economic deregulation programme and the blue-eyed boy of the subcontinent's business community

India, 50 years young this month, is no longer on a fragile economic footing. There are telling signs that the country is at last catching up with the East and South-East Asian newly industrialised tiger economies. Private corporate investment in India is expected to rise nine per cent this year to $20 billion, and foreign investment is finally pouring into India. The budget for 1997-98 contained several new proposals, in particular the reduction of corporate taxes, encouraging savings and promoting investments by the corporate sector.

India's powerful Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram is a key architect and facilitator of his country's radical economic deregulation programme. He is the golden boy of India's business community. Chidambaram was a close associate of Rajiv Gandhi, and served in the late premier's government as minister of home affairs and minister of commerce.

Chidambaram was born in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in the Siviganga constituency which he represents in parliament. Chidambaram received the largest number of votes of any Indian MP in the last elections. A veteran Congress Party member, he split from Congress after the death of Rajiv Gandhi to join the regional Tamil Nadu Congress. He is the number two man in that party today.

The Harvard-educated Chidambaram practiced as a lawyer in the capital of Tamil Nadu, Madras — now renamed Chennai. Chidambaram's wife is also a practicing lawyer. He was selected as finance minister in Prime Minister Inder Gujral's government largely on account of strong lobbying by India's business community. However, Chidambaram is known as "Mr Clean". He is a fiery orator and is widely respected, both in his home state and nationally, for his levelheadedness and efficiency.

Economically, India is still hamstrung by bureaucratic red tape and inadequate infrastructural and communications facilities. And, despite positive economic indications in the past few years, India suffers from numerous social ills. There are, for instance, an estimated 50 million child labourers in India today, and some 300 million Indians live below the poverty line. But P Chidambaram is confident about his country's economic future.

You have served under two coalition governments in the last 15 months. Do you feel that such political instability hampers your work?
Political instability certainly makes economic management difficult. But coalition governments themselves need not be unstable. The experience of the last 15 months has demonstrated our ability to persevere with a coherent plan of economic reforms within the framework of a common minimum programme agreed on by the coalition partners.

Of course, it is more challenging, and also more stimulating.

You have been quoted as saying that there is a lot of "political cacophony" in India today. What exactly do you mean by that?
I was referring to the fact that there is very vigorous and voluble competition for political space in India. This is not unusual in a vibrant democracy. Sometimes one hears extreme views.

Where did your predecessor, Manmohan Singh, go wrong? If you were in his shoes, would you have embarked on his two-year rush of radical economic reforms in the early 1990s? And how do you feel about India's rate of privatisation, economic liberalisation and deregulation?
I believe Dr Manmohan Singh served India with great distinction during the five years that he was finance minister. I certainly believe that he played an unparalleled role in the in initiation and management of economic reforms during the early 1990s.

The process of economic reform, liberalisation and deregulation is ongoing. The United Front government has pressed on with economic reforms with the objective of accelerating India's economic growth, alleviating social and economic backwardness and strengthening India's role in an increasingly integrated world economy.

What are the main features of your 'dream budget'?
I believe the key features of the 1997-98 Budget were the continued commitment to fiscal consolidation, bold tax reforms (especially in an area of direct taxes), strong commitment to social justice in the pattern of government expenditure and the announcement of a wide range of economic reforms in agriculture, industry, infrastructure and the financial sectors.

What will be the immediate and long-term effects of giving autonomy to the nine public sector undertakings that you described as the "Navaratnas, or Nine Jewels", which account for nearly three-fourths of all public sector profits in India?
The principal objective of this initiative is to enhance the efficiency and productivity of India's public sector undertakings in which the people of India have invested very heavily.

Another objective is to make them internationally competitive and encourage them to grow into transnational corporations.

The Finance Ministry has recently simplified the importation procedure for a wide range of commodities in order to reduce the time taken in goods clearance. Could you give us some details and tell us about the repercussions?
In addition to undertaking implementation of EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) in several places, starting with the Delhi Customs House, we have introduced processing of importation documents 30 days in advance, which will enable goods to be cleared immediately upon arrival at the ports or airports. This will also speed up the passage of goods through these infrastructural facilities, and save time and money for importers.

Further, we are setting up new Inland Container Depots (ICDs) in the hinterland, which will reduce cost handling cargoes, and save the managerial time involved in the processing of papers in distant ports.

Foreign equity and foreign investment proposals have become contentious issues in India today. What are your ideas on the subject?
On the contrary, I believe there is a much greater meeting of minds, cutting across almost all major political parties, on the need to encourage greater flows of foreign investment into India.

Like other large and fast growing developing countries, such as China and Indonesia, India needs foreign investment to augment domestic savings, to benefit from new technologies and to secure better access to foreign markets.

Foreign investment is particularly necessary in our key infrastructure sector such as power, telecommunications, roads and ports.

India's annual inflation rate has been brought down to 6 per cent. How did you accomplish this feat?
Actually our point-to-point inflation rate today is even lower than 5 per cent. We have brought down the inflation rate through a judicious combination of prudent monetary and fiscal policies, an increasingly open foreign trade regime and careful supply management of essential commodities such as wheat, rice, sugar and edible oils.

India's economic growth rate is still well below that of China and most East and South-East Asian tiger economies. Why is this so?
In the last three years our economic growth has been at or close to 7 per cent. This is double the so-called "Hindu Rate of Growth" of 3.5 per cent per year between 1950 and 1980.

However, we need to accelerate our growth to emulate the performance of China and other East Asian tiger economies.

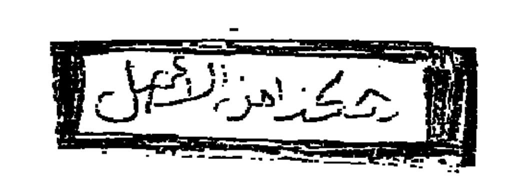
For this, we must enhance our rate of savings and investment and increase the productivity of our capital, labour and land through an acceleration of economic reforms and appropriate investments in health and education.

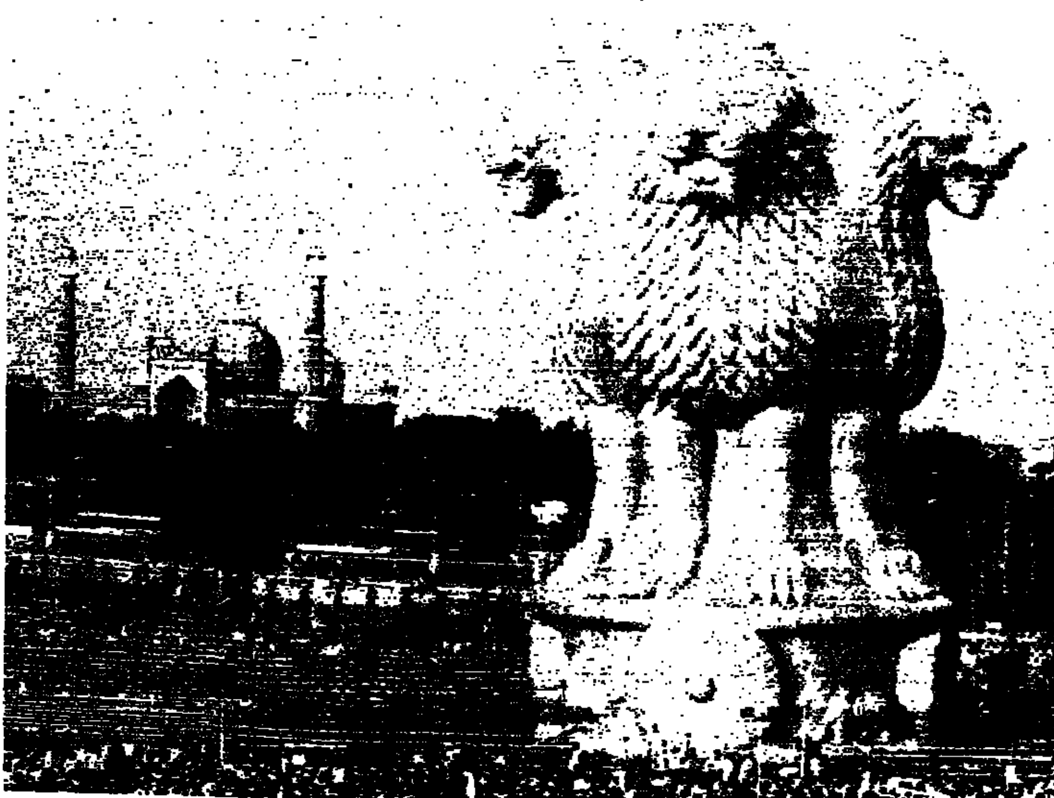
What are the chances of increased trade, economic and financial relations between India, Egypt and the Arab world?
I believe the prospects for increased trade and economic relations between India, Egypt and the Arab world are very good.

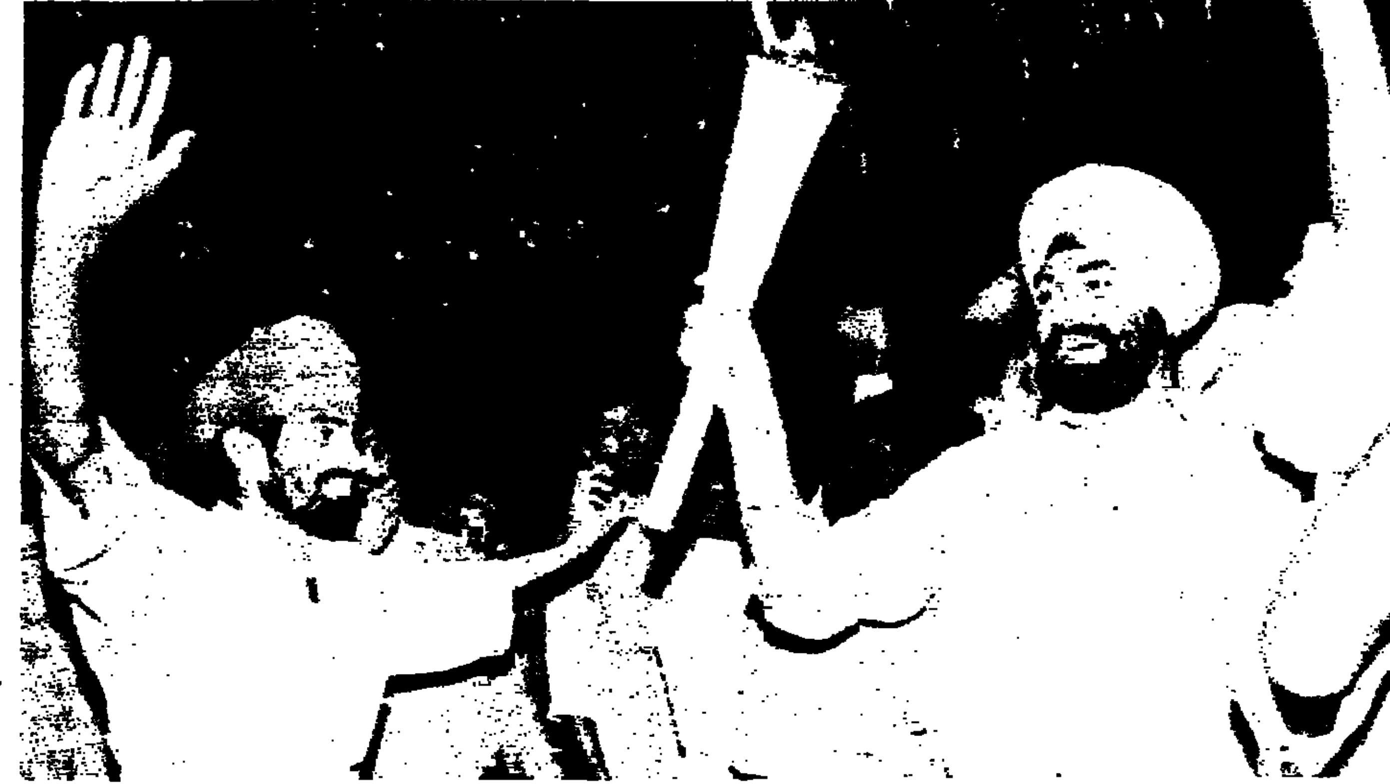
Our countries have a shared heritage and also have much to learn from each other. Like India, Egypt has also taken the path of economic liberalisation and deregulation and has opened up foreign trade and financial markets. This will facilitate growing economic linkages between India and Egypt as well as the rest of the Arab world.



Finance Minister P Chidambaram







Independence Day celebrations in Delhi with the Red Fort in the background (left) while jubilant crowds celebrate India's independence in the streets of the Indian capital *(photo: Reuter and AFP)*

How a continent divided?

United for close to a century in the struggle for independence, India's Hindus and Muslims found themselves divided as that struggle reached fruition. **Eqbal Ahmad** ponders the lessons, 50 years on

The Cold War's end has yielded a rich harvest of ethnic conflicts. Hence, there is renewed interest in the subject, and some experts in international relations have revived the argument in favour of territorial division as the best way to resolve such conflicts. At a recent conference in Italy a dozen "experts" from all over the world gathered to discuss the matter. They generated much information, yielded some insights, and offered few answers.

The conference considered five cases: India, Palestine, Cyprus, Ireland, and Bosnia. Since it was the first partition to take place after World War II, the South Asian event came up for discussion first. Most participants judged it to be a successful instance of partition in the sense that even though East Pakistan separated to become Bangladesh, the international boundaries which resulted from the 1947 division of India have remained largely stable, and it is possible today to envisage normal relations among South Asia's constituent states.

Ironically, South Asian participants tended to qualify so generous a conclusion. There was a broad consensus that Kashmir's contested status is the remaining obstacle to normal Indo-Pakistan relations, and that such normalisation is likely to have significant impact on international relations and political economy. The more interesting, of course, were the conclusions one could draw from the partition of India fifty years ago.

The subcontinental divide testified to the forest fire speed with which ethnic and religious conflicts can spread. Until almost the end of the 1930s, Muslims tended to support the Indian National Congress or provincial parties other than the Muslim League. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founding father, was himself a leading Congress leader once and widely regarded as an 'ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity'.

In the first Indian elections of 1937, the Muslim League suffered a severe defeat. Yet, three years later, it formulated the demand for Pakistan, and in 1947 achieved it. A discussion of how so dramatic a turn around occurred suggested that majority leaders' failure to comprehend the anxieties and insecurities of a minority people can result speedily in the alienation of the *minority community from the dominant party.* In the age of nationalism and mass politics such alienation is likely to be translated into the demand for 'self-determination' and separate statehood. In such situations, there is a premium not merely on goodwill but also on statesmanship.

The partition of India was a product not of ancient animosities but of modern forces among which one should mention especially colonialism, nationalism, the growth of a modern state structure, and the promise of democracy. Hindu nationalist ideologues often portray Muslims as a conquering people fundamentally alien to India. Muslim nationalists too locate the roots of their separate identity deep in history.

These claims notwithstanding, there is little in the centuries-long history of Hindu-Muslim relations to anticipate the demand and creation of separate statehood. An overwhelming majority of the sub-continent's Muslims were indigenous people who shared the languages, cultures, and historical memories of their Hindu or Sikh neighbours. They were converted to Islam not by the sword but by social forces including the Sufis who were widely revered in the countryside by members of both communities. Tension and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims did occur, as they did also within each community.

Similarly, communal violence occasionally broke out especially at proximate sites of ritual observation. Yet, organised communal violence was rare until the beginning of the 20th century when it began to make its appearance in urban areas. By and large, Hindu-Muslim relations in India may be described in the same terms as relations between various Hindu castes — as characterised by a tolerant mix of antagonism and collaboration. It is comprehensible then that in the last and most widespread and violent resistance to the implantation of British rule — the uprising of 1857 — Muslim and Hindu masses and aristocracy should have rallied symbolically around the enfeebled Mughal throne in Delhi.

The roots of the 1947 partition lay rather in contemporary realities. Great Britain, the colonial power, pursued a policy of 'divide and rule', and remained committed to it until it had lost the will to rule, and decided to 'divide and quit' in a haste that was irresponsible and costly in human lives, property and sheer mayhem. But divide-and-rule policies were not the only divisive factors associated with colonialism. There was also the contrast in Hindu and Muslim responses to the colonial encounter. For a variety of reasons Muslims tended at first to resist colonial rule more violently than did the Hindu elite and leadership classes. More importantly, Muslims shunned Western culture and education for nearly a century and did not begin to acquire modern knowledge until the latter half of the 19th century. Thus, the first Western influenced, reformist Hindu movement — the Brahmo Samaj led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy — preceded its first Muslim counterpart — Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's modernist movement — by nearly a century.

The effects of this contrast in the nature of Hindu/Muslim responses to the West were dialectical; therefore, far reaching. For example, in the colonial administration Muslims were late comers and under-represented. It followed that they were behind also in founding and joining modern political parties, and in articulating nationalist demands.

Among the Muslim upper and middle classes of the 1920s and 1930s, there was a certain sense of anxiety over having fallen behind, an anxiety which will be accentuated as the promise of independence *and democratic* rule appeared increasingly realisable. Their first instinct was to seek guarantees of minority representation in government and politics. When these were not conceded sufficiently by the dominant party — the Indian National Congress — some Muslims would turn to alternatives, to class and confessional formations. It is a noteworthy fact that until after the elections of 1937 Muslims remained engaged largely with the Indian National Congress.

Maullana Abul-Kalam Azad, two-term president of the Congress, was the most popular Muslim leader until Mr Jinnah wrested Muslim support away from him. The Maulana would later ascribe this turnabout to Congress leaders' failure to show generosity toward the defeated Muslim League and invite their participation in the many provincial governments which the Congress led following the 1937 elections. The failure of the Congress leadership lay also in not recognising the class clout of the Unionist landlords in the Punjab, the mobilising power of A K Fazlul Haq's peasant populism in Bengal, or the Muslim League's ability under Jinnah's leadership to make tactical alliances and compound its power and influence.

After the suppression of the 1857 revolt, India formally became a crown colony. The event heralded, among other developments, the organisation and expansion of a modern state and the steady growth of a native 'salariat' to serve it. The state, not a growing capitalist economy, was the parent of India's middle class, its nurturer and provider. The culture of this middle class, its outlook and aspirations, jealousies and competitive spirit were shaped by the requirements and promises of serving the state. Muslims, who had earlier shunned modern education as Western and colonial, eagerly sought it, following Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's movement, in the second half of the 19th century.

In the period between the world wars, as the colonial state expanded and also opened the doors of its superior civilian and military services to Indians, the competition for jobs became both broader, more intense, and more political. British policy of establishing quotas on the basis of religion and castes underlined the importance of jobs in the state sector, and also legitimised the expectation of communal claims on the resources of the state. As the prospect of self rule increased, so did the competition for representation in and control over the state.

Beginning with the Morley-Minto Reform Act of 1909 India made gradual advances toward representative government. By *1935, it had become obvious that within a decade or two India* will be self-governing at least as a British Dominion if not as an independent state. The Muslim minority viewed the prospect of self-rule and democracy with a mix of hope and anxiety. Broad based Muslim support for the Congress in the 1937 election was an expression of the hope. Their rapid turn toward the Muslim League in 1939-1940 marked the arousal of anxiety. The gap between hope and anxiety was widened by rival nationalisms, elements of which had become integral to the Muslim League as well as the Congress although the latter was, in principle, a non-communal party.

From its beginnings Indian nationalism had three divergent streams: self-consciously secular, Hindu, and Muslim. Such early nationalists as Aurobindo Ghosh and later Bal Gangadhar Tilak not only employed Hindu religious symbols but also portrayed the Muslim, along with the British, as the "Other". Mother India, they claimed had been the victim of both.

Muslim nationalism, on the other hand, drew on the pan-Islamic rhetoric and symbols which were in vogue during the late 19th and early twentieth centuries throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Secular and communal nationalism often resided in the same individual. Tilak was both a Congress leader and a Hindu nationalist. Mohammed Iqbal, the great Urdu/Persian poet, wrote nationalist as well as pan-Islamic poems. In Pakistan, he is honoured as a founding father while in India's republic-day celebrations, its armed forces "beat the retreat" to the tune of an Iqbal poem. The communal strains of nationalism co-existed for a time inside the Congress, converging under the umbrella of secular Indian nationalism.

Mahatma Gandhi presented a most remarkable instance of such convergence when he joined Maullana Mohamed Ali to lead the Khilafat Movement, an anti-British agitation in support of the Ottoman Caliphate which had hardly any defenders left even in Turkey. This political gesture was in complete harmony with Gandhi's style of deploying cultural and religious symbols and themes as a means to mobilising the masses in the struggle against colonialism. Ironically it was Jinnah, then a Congress leader, who warned against such spiritualisation of Indian politics. He was right. For the amalgamation of religious and secular motifs and ideas reinforced *sectarian outlooks among Muslims and Hindus alike.* As India approached independence, leaders of sectarian outlooks and sentiments such as Sardar Vallabbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad had gained commanding positions in the Congress. Mohammad Ali Jinnah was already leading the Muslim League which formulated in 1940 the demand for a separate Muslim state.

Was the partition of India inevitable? It is too early for a definitive answer. I believe, nevertheless, that India could have remained united but the price would have been the centralised colonial state. Since the end of World War I, Jinnah had been proposing decentralisation of power as a way to defuse minority fears and make independent India more governable. As nationalists everywhere have been prone to do throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, India's leaders too equated national unity and good governance with centralised power arrangements.

The last opportunity to save India's unity was presented by the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 which envisaged a loose federation with a relatively weak central government. Both the Congress and the Muslim League accepted the plan. Then the Congress had second thoughts on it, expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru. Jinnah, known by then as the Qaid-i-Azam, decided to protest this rejection with a "Direct Action Day" which passed peacefully elsewhere in India but in Calcutta ignited large scale communal violence. Mass level violence occurred next in the predominantly Muslim district of Noakhali, then a communal carnage happened in Bohr, a predominantly Hindu province.

In all three instances, Congress and Muslim League leaders cooperated to end the violence. Mahatma Gandhi campaigned at length to restore communal peace in Noakhali and Bihar. But the fire spread with astonishing speed, and eventually devoured the Mahatma himself. Large scale violence rendered the partition of India a certainty.

Barely half a year later, on 3 June 1947, the partition plan was announced. Congress and Muslim League leaders ignored the dire warnings of Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar when they acquiesced in Lord Louis Mountbatten's callous and mindless haste to become Britain's last viceroy of India. The fire spread *then with astonishing speed, devouring all in its way including* Mahatma Gandhi.

For the first time in over a decade, an Egyptian journalist returns from behind the battlefront lines of Afghanistan to tell a tale of death and destruction in the war-torn land. Yehia Ghanem **interviewed several warlords and faction leaders**

Across the frontline

Both sides in the Afghanistan conflict speak of unifying the country and disarming the fighters, but the gulf between their positions is as wide as ever. *Al-Ahram Weekly* talked to Uzbek leader Abdel-Malik Pahlewan, of the Northern Alliance, and Taliban General Abdul Samad Khaksar

General Abdel-Malik Pahlewan, whom I met in Mazar-i-Sherif, said that the Northern Alliance, to which he belongs, will continue its military campaign to topple the Taliban government and eliminate its military and political presence in Afghanistan.

Pahlewan pointed out that in the course of their fighting, the Northern Alliance seeks to avoid any military action that may increase the suffering of the Afghan people.

The Uzbek commander called on the Taliban government to proclaim Kabul a city free of weapons as a condition for the Northern Alliance to negotiate with Taliban. Asked why the Northern Alliance does not enter immediately into negotiations with the Taliban, Pahlewan said that there are many ethnic groups in Afghanistan but the Taliban movement only recognises its own, the ethnic Pashtun. He claimed that the Northern Alliance is democratic. "The rights of ethnic minorities and of women are guaranteed. But the Pashtun, and consequently the Taliban are not democratic."

Asked if the current war is due to domestic, tribal differences or regional factors, Pahlewan said that Pakistan's support of the Taliban is at the heart of the current conflict.

Questioned about the Northern Alliance's political and economic objectives, Pahlewan said, "We are seeking a regime of stability and lasting peace, on the basis of democratic elections. We are also seeking to improve economic performance, raise the standard of education for women, and safeguard civil liberties."

Evading a question on why he abandoned his former ally Abdel-Rashid Dostom, General Pahlewan said, "My alliance with the Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Masoud is the natural alliance between the leaders of two ethnic minorities. We rejected communist rule in the past. At present we refuse to be allied with Taliban — an extremist fundamentalist regime." Pahlewan, who is a staunch ally of Iran, denied any Iranian involvement in the war in Afghanistan.

General Abdel-Samad Khaksar, chief of the Defence Forces of Kabul, deputy interior minister of the Taliban government, whom I interviewed in Kabul, said that his aim is "to prevent Kabul from becoming an arena for settling accounts between international and regional forces." He countered Pahlewan's call for Kabul's disarmament. "Disarming the Afghan factions is the only way to restore law and order and the sovereignty of the state."

For Khaksar, the motives for the current bout of fighting is more domestic than regional. "Changes in alliances, internal and abroad between the armed factions is fomented by personal interests."

Khaksar affirmed that Taliban forces have achieved remarkable military progress northwards during the past few days. They were successful in seizing the strategic Qundos Valley, which leads to the stronghold of the Northern Alliance in the city of Mazar-i-Sherif, and in the region of Fariab.

General Khaksar admitted to the existence of "some pockets of the Northern Alliance" in the mountainous regions north of the capital, but he played down their military significance, claiming that they pose no serious threat to Taliban positions.

During the time when the Taliban took control of Mazar-i-Sherif, the movement tried to disarm Afghan factions. The attempt angered, Uzbek General Abdel-Malik Pahlewan, Taliban's ally at the time, prompting him to turn against the movement and attack its forces. Thousands of Taliban soldiers were killed in the ensuing fighting and nine ministers in the Taliban government were taken prisoner. The Taliban, Khaksar said, is still committed to its goal of disarming other factions.

"One of the main objectives of the movement since the beginning has been to disarm the people and the militia forces, including those of Ahmad Shah Masoud, Abdel-Rasoul Sayaf, Burhan Eddin Rabbani, Abdel-Malik Pahlewan, and the Shi'ite Wehdat Party. Our tragedy in Afghanistan proved that a major part of this impossible situation is caused by the proliferation of arms among the militant factions. Disarmament and the handing over of weapons to the government are preliminary steps to the enforcement of law and order."

Asked if the conflict of interests among regional powers — namely, Pakistan, India, Russia, the former Soviet Islamic republics and Iran — would damage the prospects of establishing a stable government in Kabul, Khaksar said, "We have suffered a lot from the attempts carried out by international and regional forces to turn our country into an arena for the implementation of their policies and the achievement of their interests... The aim of the Taliban movement, since it started, was to establish an independent central government, far removed from the conflicts of international and regional interests. We have sacrificed two million martyrs in our war with Russia, in the endeavour to free ourselves... If, after all that happened, we were to succumb to international or regional interests, what will our position be vis-à-vis our martyrs? We are determined to establish a central Islamic state that acts in the sole interests of its people."

The Taliban government, he pointed out, however, is prepared to enter into alliance with any Afghan faction so long as this is done in the public interest.

Responding to accusations that the Taliban movement is pursuing extremist policies regarding women, the General said, "The foreign policy of the Taliban is in conformity with the international law and the UN Charter. But with respect to internal laws and legislation, the matter is entirely domestic. We cannot accept international protests against our prohibiting women from receiving education or working. Those who protest are advised to observe that women's position in Afghanistan has its special historic and traditional causes. We do not oppress women. We are principled. We have promulgated these laws concerning women's work and education for women's protection."



An ancient Afghan warrior and his grandson attend a rally staged 3 August to demonstrate the willingness of the elderly of the village to fight. The elders of Gulbahar, some 50km from the Kabul frontline are ready to fight for their children and grandchildren should the Taliban return. Troops loyal to warlord Ahmad Shah Masoud ousted the Taliban from the village *(photo: AFP)*

Pakistan's fingers in Afghan pie

Pakistan's deputy foreign minister, Iftikhar Murshid, spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* on Islamabad's role in the Afghan civil war

Pakistan has been among the most ardent supporters of the Taliban government that now controls the Afghan capital Kabul. While most of the world criticises the Taliban government for its inflexible interpretation of Islam, Pakistan has financially and militarily backed the hard-line Islamist movement against its main rival — the Northern Alliance's forces.

Iftikhar Murshid, Pakistan's deputy foreign minister and special liaison for the various Afghan warring factions, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "Pakistan wishes Afghanistan well" and explained that Islamabad's recognition of the Taliban government stemmed from a series of domestic and international events.

The first of these events was a statement by Mahmoud El-Misteri, the former United Nations special envoy to Pakistan, on 2 July 1995 at a conference for peace in Afghanistan that took place in the Swedish capital Stockholm. El-Misteri reported that the regime of Burhan Ed-Din Rabbani had lost its legitimacy and only represented the Tajik minority to which Rabbani belongs.

In response to accusations by the Afghan Northern Alliance concerning Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and support for the Taliban Movement until it gained control of Kabul and two-thirds of the countryside, Murshid countered that "despite the international declaration by the UN envoy and the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in September 1996, Pakistan refused to recognise the Taliban regime for nine months. This was due to our desire not to allow the ethnic Pashtun [Taliban] to become the exclusive ruling power in the country."

Murshid also asserted that Pakistan's endeavours have always aimed at the achievement of national reconciliation in Afghanistan as a prelude to the formation of a government representing all Afghan ethnicities. He further warned against the possible fragmentation of Afghanistan because of foreign intervention. He pointed out that Pakistan is exerting every effort to prevent this from happening. "We are not seeking to make an Afghan peace in Islamabad. Any peace concluded in a foreign capital will not last for more than a few hours in Kabul. Peace can only prevail through dialogue between all factions and ethnic groups in Afghanistan," Murshid said.

Murshid explained that Islamabad only recognised the Taliban government when it felt assured that other Afghan factions recognised its hegemony. Two days before Pakistan recognised the Taliban government, the Uzbek General Abdel-Malik Pahlewan sent the Pakistan government the text of the official agreement between him and the Taliban. A few hours afterwards, they were informed that Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masoud had deputised his assistant, General Fahim, to hold negotiations with the Taliban. In addition, the Shi'ite leader Karim Khalil also joined the negotiations. The following day Taliban forces entered the city of Mazar-i-Sherif, the stronghold of the Northern Alliance, in accordance with the terms of the peace agreement between the various parties. That is when Pakistan felt that a wide-scale national reconciliation had begun and announced its recognition of Taliban.

Murshid countered the accusations made by the Northern Alliance charging Pakistan of supporting attempts to foment instability and unrest in Afghanistan by saying that his country provided immeasurable assistance to Afghanistan in its struggle against the Soviet occupation. Also, he explained that Pakistan has been directly impacted by the war in Afghanistan. Two million Afghans have taken refuge on Pakistani soil and drugs have become widespread in the country due to the lack of a powerful central authority in Kabul capable of controlling the narcotics trade. "On account of the social instability in Afghanistan, we in Pakistan have been deprived of important economic benefits, including oil refining projects. Any talk about Pakistan seeking to promote unrest in Afghanistan is fictional. We receive compliments from the various Afghan factions' leaders during our closed-door meetings with them," Murshid explained.

Murshid accused foreign forces, which he refused to identify, of standing behind the escalation of the conflict through continued arms sales to the various Afghan warring factions. Nonetheless, he emphasised that "It is to everybody's benefit to put a stop to the Afghan civil war."

Panshir: The valley of death

Ahmad Shah Masoud is tightening his siege on the Afghan capital, but the Tajik leader is aware of the need to break the cycle of violence

In *Assad Panshir*, the Panshir Valley, I watch as the "Lion's" militiamen fire hundreds of rockets against the Taliban forces in the Afghan capital Kabul. The "Lion" is Ahmad Shah Masoud, the Tajik chieftain who leads the Afghan Northern Alliance — comprising Uzbek leader General Abdel-Malik Pahlewan and Shi'ite Wehdat Party leader Karim Khalili — in its current siege of Kabul.

As fighting continues between the multi-ethnic Northern Alliance and the predominantly-Pashtun Taliban government, the Tajik leader acknowledges that the only way to resolve the crisis is at the negotiating table, irrespective of the military balance among the various minorities. Masoud told me that, because of military, political, and humanitarian considerations, he is reluctant to take Kabul by force. "I can seize Kabul in hours, but I have no desire to [do so and then] leave it a few weeks later. I am exerting military pressure in order to gain entry by political agreement... I do not wish to see hundreds of civilians killed."

Afghanistan's topography was once considered a blessing. The rugged mountain terrain not only helped the locals repel foreign invasion, but kept the country's various ethnic minorities conveniently segregated. Each ethnic minority is settled close to its respective motherland. The Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, live close to Pakistan. The Tajiks live near the border of Tajikistan. The Uzbeks live close to Uzbekistan. The Shi'ites live near Iran. This helps each community maintain ties with its motherland, but it could complicate the question of national allegiance.

The deplorable economic conditions of the country have been exploited by Afghanistan's neighbours. Iran, Pakistan, India and Russia all have their private agendas concerning the construction of oil and gas pipelines across Afghanistan.

An Afghan observer, who asked not to be identified, sums up the situation. "Afghanistan is actually divided into zones of influence among neighbouring countries. This poses the threat of fragmentation, unless these countries keep their hands off Afghanistan."

One reason the Afghan conflict has dragged on for almost two decades is that none of the rival parties is strong enough to decide matters in its favour. The Tajik leader's remarks about the necessity of reaching a political agreement before entering the capital reflects this fact.

Meanwhile, the Mujahedin factions are eager to clear their image of the five years of violence that followed their takeover of Kabul in 1992. A political adviser to Ahmad Shah Masoud denies that their forces committed human rights violations in Kabul. He blames the factions of Hekmetyar, Abdel-Rassoul Sayaf and former Uzbek leader Abdel-Rashid Dostom for the infighting that ruined the capital and led eventually to the Taliban victory in September 1996.

Pathetic end for a genocidal 'visionary'

After a summary trial viewed by some as a political game, former Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot was sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes of genocide, but the memories of the guerrilla groups' atrocities refuse to die. **Faiza Rady** reports

The elusive former Cambodian Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot was recently tried by a faction of his own insurgent guerrilla movement at Anlong Veng, a Khmer Rouge stronghold near the Thai border. He and three of his top military commanders were sentenced to life imprisonment after a two-hour trial for "crimes of genocide" — a reference to the Cambodian holocaust which left an estimated 1.7 million people dead between 1975 and 1979. The Khmer Rouge cadres, however, refused to comply with the Cambodian government's request to hand Pol Pot and his accomplices over and have them judged by an international tribunal.

Nate Thayer, an American correspondent for the Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review* and the only foreign journalist present at the trial, described it as "the most extraordinary event I have ever witnessed, the equivalent of seeing Hitler in his bunker." A visibly pained and subdued Pol Pot listened silently as his Khmer Rouge judges charged him and his three colleagues with masterminding genocide, murdering former Khmer Rouge Defence Chief Son Sen and his family, destroying national reconciliation and stealing money from the movement.

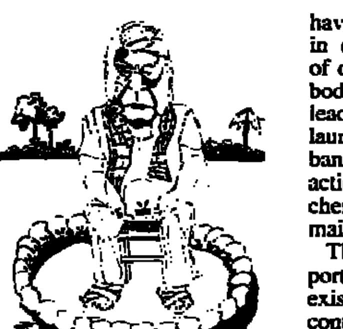
A crowd of about 500 villagers and guerrillas cheered during the proceedings, occasionally interrupting speakers with chants and applause. "Crush, crush, crush Pol Pot and his clique," they chanted. "Slumped in a simple wooden chair, grasping a long bamboo cane and a rattan fan, an anguished old man, frail and struggling to maintain his dignity, was watching his life vision crumble in utter, final defeat," wrote Thayer.

"Our ultimate goal today is that the international community should understand that we are no longer Khmer Rouge and Pol Potists," said Ta Neou, the governor of the Anglong Veng area — home to some 60,000 civilians and until recently under Pot Pol's control.

However, Second Premier Hun Sen, the leader of the Marxist Cambodian People's Party (CPP), refused to believe that Pol Pot's role had indeed ended. He told reporters in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh that the trial was a "political game", maintaining that Pol Pot was still "the leader of the Khmer Rouge forces."

In Pol Pot's bloody rule, the peasant nationalism and egalitarianism that characterised so many Third World revolutionary movements, went haywire. Striving to establish "self-independence" after the successive French and American occupations of Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge proceeded to completely restructure the country by turning it into a vast labour camp. "Pol Pot had a design which was clearly a sign of madness, that he was going to push everybody into the countryside and return the country to an agrarian lifestyle, reject all formal education, and eliminate anyone who was impure — that is, who belonged to what he regarded as the bourgeois part of society," explained writer Sydney Schanberg, an eye-witness to the evacuation of the capital Phnom Penh. "It was like something none of us had ever seen — two million people being forced to leave their homes and march into the countryside."

Pol Pot's fall from grace, after a leadership of more than 35 years, had been in the making for the past few months. Since July of last year when the Khmer Rouge splintered into a more moderate faction based in western Cambodia and Pol Pot's Anglong Veng-based group in the north, a power struggle over shifting alliances ended in Pol Pot's defeat. Opposing an alliance engineered by the Khmer Rouge's military commander Ta Mok with the First Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh and his party — the National United Front for an Independent Neutral Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) — Pol Pot's attempts to eliminate Ta Mok finally backfired.



But Pol Pot's removal from the Khmer Rouge leadership does not mean that the movement has lost its relevance. "The aggressive courting of Khmer Rouge factions by Cambodia's rival premiers, Hun Sen and Prince Norodom Ranariddh, was central to [Hun Sen's] July 5 coup [against Ranariddh]," explained Thayer.

Many analysts believe that the political survival of the Khmer Rouge, despite their tainted history, hinges on the coalition government's failure to develop the country effectively. Both the CCP and FUNCINPEC are perceived by most Cambodians as corrupt and power hungry. The FUNCINPEC in particular is ravaged by internal clan rivalries and has been accused of promoting nepotism, the embezzlement of huge campaign funds and constant human rights violations.

The government's reputation for corruption is such that it has totally discouraged foreign investment. While Japan has provided generous aid funds for the country's reconstruction, financiers have failed to invest a single yen in development projects. Instead of developing its economy, Cambodia is on its way to becoming a leading centre of drug money laundering: 25 of the country's 29 banks specialise in such transactions. Phnom Penh's airport, Pochentong, is one of the world's main cash transit points.

The 1995 UN Human Rights Report on Cambodia denounced the existence of several torture centres controlled by army intelligence personnel and the establishment of quasi-autonomous military strongholds in several provinces. As a result of the tenuous government coalition between royalists and leftists, each party vied for the army's loyalty by outbidding the other in funding it — leaving the country's health, education, social services and agrarian development budgets in a shambles and dependent on the vagaries of foreign donors. This in a country still suffering from the ravages of civil war, with more than 55,000 internal refugees, one of the world's highest concentration of mine fields resulting in an average of 300 casualties per month and the world's highest rate of tuberculosis — a disease mainly caused by malnutrition. Many Cambodians survive on less than one dollar a day.

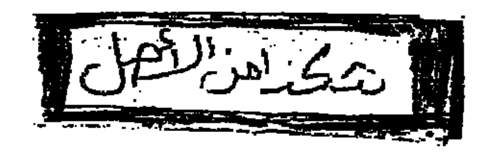
While the coalition government is perceived as "rotten to the core," many Cambodians believe the Khmer Rouge to be principled and honest — albeit by default. "Today's Cambodia crawls with greed and corruption at the highest levels", warned Julio Jeldres, founder of the Khmer Institute for Democracy, a human rights group. "Corruption creates resentment and inequality and helps dissatisfied people fall under the spell of the Khmer Rouge."

Commenting on the movement's political longevity, despite the "killing fields", Thayer explained: "There is quite a chasm between the international reputation of the Khmer Rouge and their ability to garner significant enough popular support to be a formidable political force in Cambodia, even 20 years after their reign of terror in the late 1970s."

Besides their reputation for integrity, the Khmer Rouge's survival as a significant political force is also related to their history of struggle against the royalist regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk and their anti-imperialist stand against the American invaders in the Cambodian hinterlands during the early '70s. Embroiled in Vietnam, the US wanted to destroy the regional support bases of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and expanded their military operations to Laos and Cambodia.

"In April 1970, both South Vietnam and the US invaded Cambodia and for the next three years, this country, only a little over half the size of Italy, was carpet-bombed by American B-52s," wrote political analyst Richard Wilson. And it was during this period of civil strife and anti-imperialist guerrilla warfare that the Khmer Rouge established their mass support base in the rural areas, a base which survives, to a certain extent, to this day.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Political party life in Egypt began in 1907 with the establishment of three groups: the Umma Party, the Nationalist Party and the Reform Party, in that order. The Nationalist Party, led by the famous campaigner against British occupation Mustafa Kamel, was by far the most popular. As the leading newspaper of the time, *Al-Ahram* initially opposed the idea of political parties. But it changed its position later and gave its unqualified support to the Nationalist Party. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** traces the birth of political parties from reports published in *Al-Ahram*


Illustration by: Makram Henein

"Every party is happy with what they have." Thus read the headline of *Al-Ahram*'s leading front-page article in its 26 November 1907 edition. The article was signed "The Sphinx", although one suspects the newspaper's editors knew the man's identity as *Al-Ahram* described him as "a prominent writer." The occasion for this article was the inauguration several months previously of Egypt's first experiment in political party life. There was a bitter controversy at the time over the importance of the inception of political parties at that phase of the country's history.

For its part, *Al-Ahram* was not sufficiently convinced of the value of party politics, an opinion that was voiced by "The Sphinx".

Within the space of a few months in 1907, three political parties came into being. The first was the Reform Party, described by our anonymous author as "moderate." This party, advocating constitutional reform, consisted of 40 members. The second was the Umma (Nation) Party with some 108 members "after a number of members dropped out. The third and largest was the Nationalist Party with 250 members.

The Egyptian nationalist movement had undergone important developments in the course of the three preceding years. As a result of the entente cordiale between France and Britain in 1904, France was obliged to relinquish its support of the nationalist movement. The following year the Khedive Abbas Helmi II agreed to visit Great Britain, further undermining the morale of the movement. In 1906, when the Ottoman government was forced to recoil in the face of British threats over the famous Taba incident, the nationalists saw one of their last stays of support vanish. Henceforward they had no one to rely on but themselves.

The execution of Egyptian peasants by British occupation authorities in the notorious Dinshway incident in the latter half of 1906 provided the nationalist movement a much needed opportunity. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kamel, the nationalists mobilised a massive campaign against the policies of the British occupation, causing intense embarrassment to British officials both in Cairo and in London. So successful was this campaign that the nationalists considered the events of 1906 to mark the birth of an independent nationalist movement that was not dependent upon outside support.

Yet they believed it was an essential ingredient for success of all involved in political action within the rising nationalist movement to be united in solidarity. There could be no fundamental discord between them, even under a democratic umbrella that brought into being political parties. This was the concept of democracy that *Al-Ahram* favoured at first.

It was Lord Cromer, the British high commissioner, who first raised the notion of political parties. His ideas in this regard appeared in his annual report of 1906, the last he was to write before he left the country. In his report, which was published in *Al-Ahram* on 4 April 1907, Cromer distinguished between two groups engaged in the nationalist endeavour. The first, he said, called themselves the Nationalist Party and consisted of the followers of Mustafa Kamel, although Cromer did not mention his name explicitly. Referring to them as adherents of pan-Islamism, he spared little acrimony in vilifying this group who were compelled by necessity to "fuel racial and religious hatred whether overtly or covertly."

Juxtaposed to these was "a small but growing group of Egyptians of whom not a small number are followers of Sheikh Mohamed Abduh." This second group he described as "sincere patriots who aspire to advance the interests of their fellow countrymen. They are untainted by the notions of pan-Islamism and they do not oppose the introduction of Western civilisation into their country. One of their most prominent members, *Saad Zaghlul Pasha, has recently* been appointed as minister of public education. The reason for his appointment was to enable a highly intelligent and enlightened Egyptian individual from this group to participate in the endeavours of Egyptian reform."

When the pro-British *Egyptian Gazette* attempted to promote Cromer's ideas, *Al-Ahram* responded, "All Egyptians together form a single party founded around the aspiration for independence and the hope to end the occupation. No two Egyptians disagree on this point. If there exists an individual who thinks otherwise, you will find that he is a foreigner who came to Egypt to make money. The only difference that exists among Egyptians concerns the means with which they hope to attain their aspirations. The party of the elderly believe that we should remain on peaceful terms with the occupiers until the nation achieves sufficient progress to be able to stand on its own. As for the party of the young, they believe that we should constantly harangue the British and continually remind the nation that it is under their domination."

It is a measure of its support for Mustafa Kamel's ideas that *Al-Ahram* published his response to a critical article in the London *Times*. "The Nationalist Party," Mustafa Kamel is quoted as saying, "is purely Egyptian. If it has sometimes been forced to rely on this government or that, this is because it can not dispense with that nation. This applies particularly to the government of the Ottoman sultan, a matter upon which all Muslims in Egypt agree." Elsewhere in this response Mustafa Kamel said, "If the Egyptian people are agitating in order to make the British fulfil their promise to evacuate the country, the agitation is purely Egyptian, not Islamic, in origin. Some readers demanded that *Al-Ahram* declare its own position with regard to the notion "there are no two parties on the question of independence." Beneath the headline, "Extremist or moderate: the question is put to *Al-Ahram*," the editors answer, "The inventors of the word 'party' in this country *are originally European writers whose* notions were quickly adopted by the British, and primarily Lord Cromer. They claim that there is a Nationalist Party in Egypt and that the owner of *Al-Liwa* (Mustafa Kamel) is its leader. Indeed, this party is nationalist in that it seeks national independence and reform. We have written at length asserting that there are no separate parties in Egypt on the issue that Egypt should be ruled by Egyptians."

However the events of 21 September 1907 pulled the rug out from under *Al-Ahram*'s position. On that day, the owner of *Al-Garida*, Hassan Abdel-Raziq, announced the founding of the Umma Party. To historians of modern Egyptian history this day marked the beginning of political party life in Egypt. And the Umma Party appeared to meet all the requirements: a working membership, a general assembly, a board of directors, a newspaper to serve as the party's mouthpiece and, last but not least, a specific platform.

Al-Ahram did not rejoice at the founding of the new party, in spite of the fact that its editors were on good terms with many of the members. In fact, when the new party declared its platform, the newspaper voiced its criticism in quite antagonistic terms. "It is the opinion of this party that the nation should not be given independence because it is not yet sufficiently equipped. The party's objective, therefore, is to work for the advancement of the nation so that it can become so equipped. This endeavour is outlined in the published party programme which stipulates that only this party to the exclusion of all others should represent the nation since its membership consists of highly placed notables some of whom are members of the legislative assembly."

The founding of the Umma Party offered *Al-Ahram* the opportunity to discuss the cause for the emergence of political parties abroad.

The newspaper goes on to criticise political party life as it had been known up *to then in Egypt. In Egypt, it contended,* political parties somehow developed back to front. The political parties that had emerged at that point had all originally been newspapers. *Al-Liwa* gave rise to the Nationalist Party, *Al-Garida* brought forth the Umma Party and *Al-Mu'ayyid* nurtured the Reform Party.

On 22 October 1907 at the Zizinya Theatre in Alexandria, Mustafa Kamel announced the establishment of the Nationalist Party. In the words of *Al-Ahram's* correspondent, Mustafa Kamel was "an eloquent speaker whose very appearance attracts one to the subject he is addressing, particularly as that subject is Egypt and nationalism."

Mustafa Kamel outlined a 10-point programme for the Nationalist Party. These the correspondent summed up as "securing the independence of Egypt, forming a council of representatives, establishing a constitutional government and advancing the prosperity and development of the country." At the conclusion of his one-hour speech, Mustafa Kamel refuted the charge of his adversaries that he sought to rid the country of the British only to hand it over to Turkey and that be hoped to engage the support of Germany toward this end. He then invited all to join his new party.

"This is an event which we cannot let pass without contributing our say," said *Al-Ahram* on the following day. Indeed the entire front page of the newspaper was devoted to discussing what it termed "the Alexandria speech." This speech, it said, should allay the fears that had been held by many Egyptians that the formation of political parties would divide the nationalist movement.

The newspaper was also impressed with Mustafa Kamel's refusal to give in to despair following the entente cordiale. It quoted Mustafa Kamel as saying "The British had imagined that this agreement with France would render the Egyptian people as silent as one of their ancient monuments. They could not have been more mistaken."

Two days later the offices of *Al-Liwa* *distributed leaflets containing the party* programme and outlining the conditions for membership.

In spite of the generally cool relations between *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Liwa*, *Al-Ahram* was one of the new party's well-wishers, expressing its hopes that it would attract "a very large membership." The newspaper also reversed its former position regarding political parties. Now it encouraged its readers to "join a political party as this is an action worthy of esteem."

The third major political party was founded on 6 December 1907. The Reform Party, headed by Sheikh Ali Youssef, owner of *Al-Mu'ayyid* drew its membership largely from supporters of the khedive. Indeed, the first of its seven principles which were published in *Al-Ahram* on 9 December, was "to support the authority of the khedive in accordance with the provisions of the Ottoman firmans regarding Egypt's administrative autonomy."

Over the remaining weeks of the year, which some historians refer to as the year of political parties, *Al-Ahram* continued to express its distaste for the Umma Party. This it did by giving prominence to articles and letters to the editor criticising the party. At the same time, *Al-Ahram*'s support for the Nationalist Party was unflagging.

Al-Ahram also took part in the heated controversy over whether students should take part in political party life. *Al-Mu'ayyid* and *Al-Munir*, reflecting the position of the Reform Party and *Al-Garida* for the Umma Party were opposed to student participation in politics. The Nationalist Party's *Al-Liwa* was adamant in encouraging students to participate. The positions of the two camps were clearly understandable, for the Nationalist Party, highly popular among the young, stood to gain the most.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Give kids the world

"GIVE kids the world" is a new concept being applied at the Helnan Shepheard Hotel. Mohamed Hendawy, executive assistant general manager and head of food and beverages, explained that, effective this month, a children's party will be held at the Nefertiti Ballroom of the Helnan Shepheard Hotel, which will entertain more that 300 children and will feature cartoons, a ninja team, a muppet show, a magician, a clown and other surprises. The party will be held every second Friday of the month.

Money & Business

Air-dumping measures

ENG. Ibrahim Salem Mohamedein, chairman of Alexandria National Steel and Iron Co., said that the Anti-Dumping Department at the Ministry of Home Trade and Food Supply, will start enforcing anti-dumping measures against construction iron importers. This confirms the interest of the Egyptian government in protecting national industries.

Salem added that contractors should use local iron manufactured to local specifications which competes in quality and price with imported iron.

NBE's investment trustees extend novel services

IN LINE with its concerted efforts to tail the fleet of universal banking, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has developed traditional services in addition to introducing non-traditional ones. Such a trend has played a pivotal role in activating and raising the efficiency of the money market. In that vein, NBE's Investment Trustees Department has extended a bulk of services that would boost the business sector, propel investments and activate the money market as follows:

A. Company incorporation:

Acting as a proxy on behalf of others, the Investment Trustees Department obtains approval from competent bodies, prepares the preliminary contracts and articles of association, takes over companies' registration in the commercial register, extracts the tax card and arranges for the general meeting as well as board meetings. Furthermore, the department carries out companies' administrative and financial aspects and prepares the inner regulations.

B. Subscription services:

In tandem, Investment Trustees Department is entitled to obtain the approval of the Capital Market Authority regarding the offering circular. This is in addition to completing all the necessary documents with a view to authenticating subscription. Besides, the Department covers all banking and statistical aspects and obtains the approvals deemed necessary for authenticating the offerings.

C. Investment services and marketing securities

In fact, Investment Trustees Department compiles studies concerned with investing liquidity, provides data deemed necessary for adopting investment decisions, promotes new enterprises, offers public sector companies for subscription, expands the capital base and adopts the suitable strategies for marketing securities and liquidation.

D. Marketing real estate:

NBE has established the premier Real Estate Market in Egypt in the interest of the buyer and vendor. The Market buys and sells on behalf of others in addition to carrying out the technical evaluation and reviewing the related documents. This is besides setting marketing programs and providing the necessary data in respect of the housing projects in Egypt. The Market is accommodated by the necessary equipment that would help the buyer and vendor to take the right decision. The Market also provides a monthly price index.

Reserve your space now for ACITEX '98

WITH a view towards increasing the awareness of the role of computers and information technology in all aspects of everyday life, and showcasing the rapid developments taking place in the computer and information field, Al-Ahram Establishment holds its annual computer and information technology exhibition, ACITEX, which has now become a major event, both locally and abroad.

To increase the number of companies and sponsors this year, the exhibition will be held at the Cairo International Conference Centre, with its large floorspace and wings that will be able to accommodate exhibitors and attendees alike.

Its worth mentioning that ACITEX will coincide with the 6th annual International Conference on Artificial Intelligence, which will also be held at the Cairo International Conference Centre. The conference will be organised by the Egyptian Computer Association, in cooperation with the American University in Cairo, the AMAC Centre.

Exhibition space is available through easy-term payments until 1 October 1997. For more information and reservations, telephone 3391071 or fax 3941866.

Egypt to speed up privatisation

The government wants to accelerate the pace of privatisation. But critics are sceptical, citing the fact that previous deadlines have not been met. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

Government plans to accelerate the privatisation of public-sector companies gained a new momentum last week as the Cabinet Privatisation Committee (CPC), headed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, decided to sell off 34 state-owned companies over the next six months. Ten of these companies are due to go through the stock exchange. The 34 companies slated for sale include five maritime transport companies, four textile companies, six agricultural development companies and five metallurgical companies. The list also includes companies in areas of engineering, chemical and food industries, housing and construction, flour mills and electricity. The most attractive companies on this list are Al-Ameriya Cement, the Egyptian Electric Cables, El-Shams Housing & Construction, El-Wadi Trade & Cotton Ginning and the Delta Industrial (Ideal) and El-Nasr Textile and Wool.

Since the start of the privatisation programme in 1994, the government has sold off 76 companies out of a list of 314. Of this figure, the majority shares of 26 companies were floated on the stock market, another six were sold off entirely to strategic investors, and the majority stakes of 10 land reclamation companies were sold directly to the companies' Employee Shareholders' Associations (ESAs).

In addition, the majority stake in 14 companies was sold as assets, while minority shares of 20 companies were also sold. These privatisations have netted slightly over LE5 billion in revenue. Of this figure, El-Ganzouri said that LE2.05 billion was used to settle a part of companies' debts to banks, pay tax arrears and wages of employees of loss-making companies and mining workers.

While government and public sector officials welcomed last week's privatisation move, some observers and analysts cast doubt on the government's success in meeting the proposed schedule. They argue that while El-Ganzouri's government set for itself an ambitious target early this year of privatising 52 companies in the first half of 1997, so far only 13 companies have been sold.

The privatisation of state-run companies faced a number of obstacles recently, the most significant of which were the differences arising between state agencies over ownership, value and use of state assets. The government is currently reviewing the measures used in valuing companies and pricing their share offerings. The sale price of companies was criticised as unrealistic and determined by a very slow and complicated process. The fact that the price is set by as many as 66 experts from the various holding companies, the Central Auditing Agency and the Cabinet Privatisation Committee led to different valuations of share prices.

However, joint committees comprising representatives of the Central Auditing Agency and various holding companies were formed by El-Ganzouri to re-evaluate the capital and assets of some companies in the field of maritime transport, and industrial and commercial activities.

El-Ganzouri also decided to exclude the unutilised lands owned by some public-sector companies from the sale list, and use them instead for public service purposes in an attempt to reach a more realistic price for the companies' privatised shares. It was noted that the land assets owned by some companies *led the valuation committees to set an* exaggerated sale price for the company's shares, something which proved to be largely responsible for the recent plunge in share purchases on the stock exchange. El-Ganzouri's decision was taken despite the objections of chairmen of holding companies on the grounds that these lands would be more useful if they were sold and the proceeds used in paying part of the companies' debts.

The painfully slow pace of privatisation in recent months has brought upon the government sharp criticism from two opposite camps. The old guard, including left-wing parties and MPs, were undaunted by a Constitutional Court ruling last February that privatisation is constitutional. They have stepped up a relentless campaign accusing the government of bowing to IMF pressure. Moreover, they claim the government has reneged on its earlier promises of keeping strategic industries such as aluminium, iron and steel and flour mills out of the privatisation programme.

The other camp, which includes business leaders and liberal parties, charges that the government's earlier initiative to reduce the size of Egypt's bloated public sector and to put privatisation at the centre of its economic reform programme, has now been replaced by hesitance and a lack of seriousness.

From the liberal-minded camp, Ahmed Abu Ismail, former minister of finance, argued that for the last three years an average of 25 companies have been privatised each year.

"This means that for the government to sell the remaining companies, it has to grapple with the privatisation programme for more than 12 years," he said.

Abu Ismail attributed the slow pace of privatisation to the fact that senior government officials, in spite of their harping on privatisation, still feel that this policy was a result of IMF pressure and that the public sector is still a necessity for the majority of Egyptians.

He also cites the lack of transparency in financial and administrative data on floated companies as one reason behind the sudden fluctuations in share prices on the stock exchange in the recent period.

From the old guard camp, Ahmed Taha, a leftist MP, believes that the privatisation policies are proving each day that they are biased in favour of the "wealthy minority", at the expense of "the poor majority".

According to Taha, the advantages claimed for privatisation — that it introduces more competition and reduces bureaucracy — have so far proved to be an illusion.

"Privatisation and corruption... both seem to go hand in hand," he said. "Consider the increase in unemployment rates which now stand at 17 per cent of the workforce, and consider the internal debt which climbed from LE105 billion in 1991 to LE150 billion last year."

"Privatisation is *just* an international *policy to* enable a small group of multinational companies to dominate the markets of Egypt and the rest of the developing world," said Taha.

Even the two chairmen of the economic committees in the People's Assembly and Shura Council can't agree on privatisation policies so far.

Vehemently refuting leftist charges levelled against the privatisation programme, Ahmed Rashad Moussa, chairman of the Shura Council's Economic Committee, argues that the current problems leading to a decrease in the pace of privatisation should not blind Egypt to the fact that the first two stages of this programme have produced remarkable and tangible results.

"Let the figures speak for themselves," stated Moussa. "Since 1991 inflation has fallen from 21 per cent to its current level of seven per cent; the budget deficit was slashed from 18 per cent in 1991 to 1.3 per cent of GDP; foreign exchange reserves have climbed from around $7 billion in 1991 to $18.6 billion in June 1996, representing an 18 months' import cover."

"Leftists will never be able to grasp the real meaning of privatisation and market economy policies because the public sector is still their holy of holies," he argued

In the People's Assembly's Economic Committee, the outlook on recent privatisation moves is very different. According to the committee's chairman Mostafa El-Said, privatisation in Egypt has proved to be a transfer of ownership rather than a policy aimed at raising productivity and investment rates.

"Egypt's economy needs real growth of at least seven per cent to create half a million jobs per year for the unemployed," said El-Said. "This requires, according to the government, annual investments of LE60 billion. It is not clear how the government will be able to get this amount in light of the fact that it has recently decided to direct part of the privatisation proceeds to pay off the companies' debts to banks rather than funnel them into new investment projects.

"The private sector, on the other hand, has become fond of using its limited financial resources for playing the stock market instead of investing in long-term industrial and agricultural projects."

He expects that the recent move to privatise more companies will also reduce the flow of private capital to direct investments in favour of more speculation on the stock exchange.

"This is the truth and nothing but the truth," El-Said said.

Small investors' stock market blues

Think that the ten shares you own can be played up into a fortune on the Egyptian Stock Exchange? Think again, writes Shereen Abdel-Razek

Last year Mohamed Nour, a 30-year-old chemist who works for a pharmaceutical company, inherited LE7,000 from his father. Married and already owning a car and an apartment, Nour decided to invest the money in a way he believes to be consistent with the *Shari'a* (Islamic law).

"I refused to deposit the money in a bank as I believe that bank interests are *haram*," said Nour. "So I decided to put it in the stock exchange where I heard yields are high."

Some devout Muslims believe that interest on bank loans is a violation of Islamic laws, deeming it tantamount to usury.

Nour turned to a well-known brokerage firm, and when asked by the broker where he wanted to put his money, listed the names of five companies which he had read about in the press.

But Nour complains that the broker did not attempt to discuss his choices or even suggest alternatives.

"The broker listened to me, took my order, and bought the shares," he complained.

For the first two months he played the market, its stock prices were rocketing up and he realised LE2,500 in capital gains on his investment.

The market, however, entered a slump, with stock prices declining rapidly. As Nour watched his investments dwindle, he realised that he did not have enough experience to determine whether to sell quickly or wait it out until prices increased again.

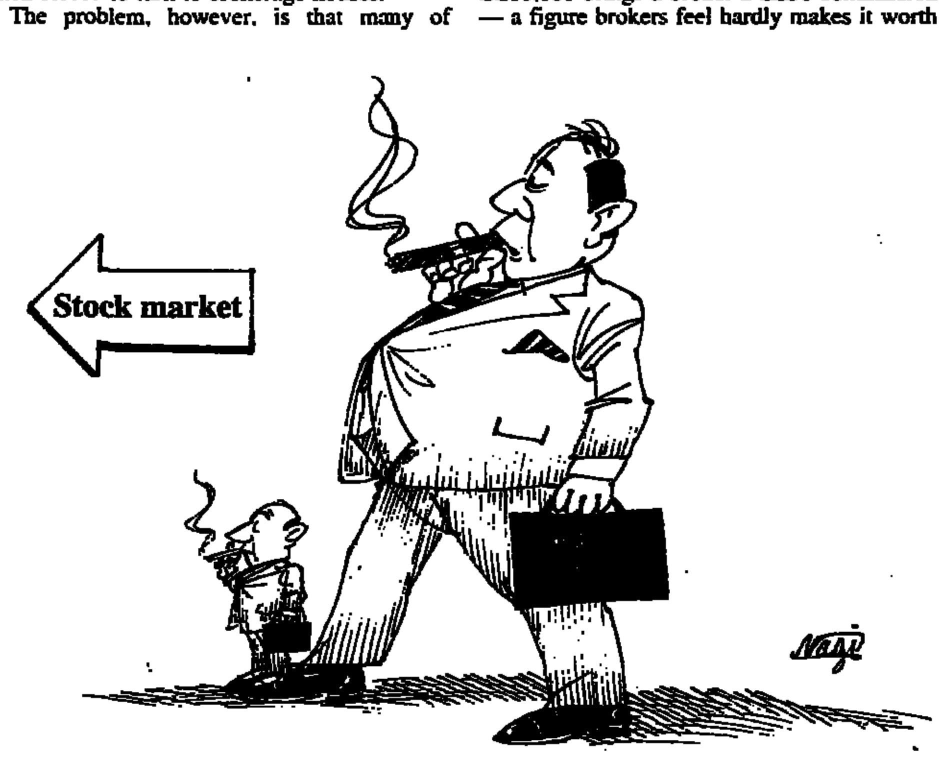
"I felt that my broker, as well as others I consulted, did not seem to have an answer either," Nour stated. "I decided to escape with the least possible losses, and asked the broker to sell all the shares at any price."

Nour walked away with LE8,000 — a LE1,000 gain on his initial investment. Although he came out slightly ahead, stories similar to his are repeated every day, and not *all have a reasonably happy ending.*

Despite the presence of a large number of brokerage firms, mutual funds and portfolio management companies, dozens of inexperienced small investors are hit with losses on the stock exchange.

Brokers attribute this to the fact that according to the capital market law, portfolio management companies, which should be directing small investors in the market, cannot accept investments of less than LE50,000 per investor. This minimum precludes thousands of people such as Nour. These investors are then forced to turn to brokerage houses.

The problem, however, is that many of



these firms are not willing to accept small in*vestments or to provide the necessary* advice.

"We do not accept orders of less than LE10,000," says Amani Hamed, managing director of Okaz Stock Brokers and Management Consultants. Hamed noted that almost all brokerage companies working in the Egyptian market have a fixed minimum for investor orders which, in some cases, is as high as LE30,000.

Hamed explained that brokers are unwilling to accept such small investments because under the law they can only get a 0.5 per cent commission. For example, an investment of LE10,000 brings a broker a LE50 commission — a figure brokers feel hardly makes it worth their while.

Moreover, argued Hamed, brokerage companies are not supposed to serve as investment consultants. While they may recommend certain shares at a certain time, they do not interfere with an investor's decision to buy or sell.

Small investors also face a disadvantage in that they do not receive follow-up reports on the performance of their stocks as do large investors.

Sherif Carrarah of EFG-Hermes, an investment banking firm, says that the stock market is not the place for small investors who not only lack the knowledge to manage their own portfolios, but also the means of building one that is diversified.

"With the average price of shares in the Egyptian market at around LE70, it is difficult to form a diversified portfolio that contains stocks from different sectors that carry different risks and yields," he said.

Carrarah recommends investment funds as the best bet for small investors. In addition to reasonable prices of investment certificates — those of the 12 funds currently working in Egypt do not exceed LE100-200 per certificate — Carrarah said that fund experts have the ability to make investment decisions based on market research. The fact that the certificates represent a diversified investment hedges against a sudden drop in value.

Reiterating Carrarah's point of view, Hani Tawfik, chairman of International Investors, a private equity management company, says that in addition to providing small investors with security, investing in mutual funds also saves money.

Brokerage firms charge a flat 0.5 per cent rate of commission on transactions, regardless of the volume of the transaction because, brokers argue, all transactions consume the same time and overheads.

On the other hand, commissions for mutual fund brokers do not exceed 0.3 per cent, and the mutual funds management companies do not take more than 1 per cent as an annual commission. This means that the overall cost of investing in funds is less than what is paid to brokers.

Tawfik stated that in emerging markets, *small investors* are *usually* the market's biggest losers.

"Lacking an understanding of the market and the means to conduct the necessary research, small investors usually sustain the biggest losses while mutual funds and large investors make the biggest gains," he said.

South African tour

AN EGYPTIAN delegation headed by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa is scheduled to go to South Africa next week to take part in the second session of the Egyptian-South African Joint Committee. The delegation, which includes 15 businessmen representing various sectors of industry, is expected to sign five agreements during the meeting in Pretoria. **Inas Nour reports.**

"The first session of this joint committee was held in Cairo early last year. The last meeting they had took place in April 1996 in Cairo," South Africa's ambassador to Egypt, Justus De Gouda, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"The agreements are designed to boost tourism, avoid double taxation, organise air and marine transport and encourage cultural and scientific cooperation," he explained. "I am glad that a business delegation is going to South Africa with the minister. Egypt is busy with its privatisation programme. We too. We see that the privatisation programme got going in Egypt two years ago. There are further opportunities for closer cooperation between our two countries now. As both countries' economies grow, the opportunities will multiply."

"There are complaints that our business people are not coming and that they are not paying attention to the Egyptian market. The trip of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa accompanied by a businessmen's delegation will be one of the important steps." Moussa's trip is also expected to include visits to four other African countries.

Egypt's main exports to South Africa include oil, ceramic and glass products, textiles, and agricultural products. South African exports to Egypt include foodstuffs, basic metals, chemical products, paper and plastic products.

Job-creating centre

THE SOCIAL Fund for Development (SFD) signed last week a memorandum of understanding with the World Association for Small and Medium Enterprise (WASME) to set up a regional centre for small and medium enterprises in Cairo.

According to SFD's Managing Director Hussein El-Gammal, the centre aims at creating new jobs and alleviating poverty in the region through the promotion of rural enterprises and micro, small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in urban areas.

The centre is to be established within the next six months, and its initial activities will be limited to providing necessary information for SMEs and providing them with access to new technology.

It will also promote and market the production of these enterprises and help in the cost-effective transportation of their goods.

In later stages, the centre will finance these enterprises, El-Gammal said.

With the Arab League agreeing to participate in the centre's establishment, El-Gammal believes that it will be a key vehicle for promoting inter-Arab cooperation and will help pave the way for the establishment of an Arab common market.

He noted that the memorandum of understanding signed by the 107-member WASME offers the SFD international exposure, especially in developed countries, some of which are donors to the Association.

WASME is an international non-governmental organisation that is concerned with the advocacy and development of policies and strategies for stimulating the growth of SMEs.

New Cement stocks

SUBSCRIPTIONS for a 10.5 million share offering in the South Valley Cement Company recently closed more than nine times over-subscribed, company officials reported.

A representative of Banque Misr, one of the founders of the company, said that they received purchase requests for 95 million shares while only 10.5 million shares were initially put up for public subscription.

The new share offering represents 30 per cent of the company's LE350 million capital.

The price per share has been specified at LE10, with an individual purchase minimum of 50 shares. The minimum for institutions is 1,000 shares.

"We met the demands of the broader sector of buyers," the Banque Misr representative said. "However, for large purchase orders we covered only 10 to 12 per cent of the quantities they demanded."

The new company, which will have its plant in Kharga, 550km south-west of Cairo, is expected to start out by producing around 1.5 million tons of cement annually to supply construction works in the New Valley project.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Market report

Market witnesses moderate gains

FOR the second week in a row, the General Market Index witnessed a marginal increase, gaining 1.3 points to close at 336.56 for the week ending 14 August. The value of market transactions increased to LE248 million from LE193.73 million the week before.

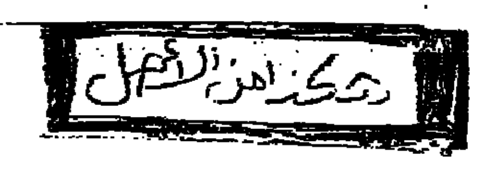
Medinat Nasr Housing and Development topped the market in terms of value of traded shares. With LE48 million in shares changing hands, it cornered 18.8 per cent of the market activities, but lost LE0.08 per cent to close at LE237.92.

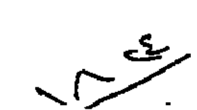
Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) traded through the week accounted for 8.19 per cent of the overall number of traded shares. The bank reported a 9.3 per cent increase in its half-year profits, but its shares increased in value by 1.07 per cent to close at LE73.52.

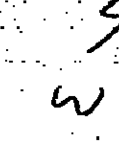
The Arab Development and International Trade Company was the market's biggest gainer, its stock registering a 21.54 per cent increase before leveling off at LE165.3. Shares of the Alexandria Maritime and Commercial Bank gained 15.41 per cent to close at LE215.81.

Shares of the Egyptian Expatriates for Investments and Development shouldered the highest loss in value, dropping by 14.04 per cent to close at LE 24.37.

In all, 64 companies recorded an increase in share price, 47 decreased and 31 remained unchanged.

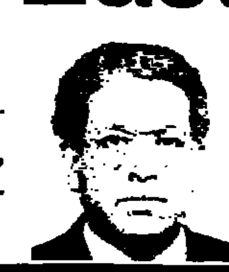






Rethinking peace in the Middle East

Unless rapid measures are taken to salvage the nearly defunct peace process, writes **Abdel-Moneim Said**, fundamentalisms will flourish on every side



When US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrives in the region around the end of this month as planned, she will have a lot of fixing to do. She will probably have to rethink means of managing the entire process in order to reconcile a widening gap between the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, and the Israelis. More important, however, she will face rising anger on both sides, caused by a process that seems to breed only fear, anguish, and mistrust. In the Arab world, she will face a lack of confidence in the ability and the will of the US administration to respect the implementation of agreements signed in the White House and witnessed by the president. She will be held accountable for the deficiencies of a process that has failed so far to provide *peace and security for* any of the parties.

In the first half of the 1990s, it seemed as though the Middle East would be affected by the fundamental transformations occurring as the century drew to a close. The Gulf War and the end of the Cold War created opportunities in the region. Through active American mediation efforts, the Madrid process was begun in October 1991 and by 1994 a Palestinian-Israeli agreement and an Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty were in place. What was important about the new Arab-Israeli reconciliation process was that it introduced a geo-economic dimension to its traditional geo-political concerns of territory and security. In addition to bilateral negotiations, *multilateral* talks were to deal with five issues of interest to all parties involved: arms control, water, refugees, economic development, and environment. Although the results of the multilateral negotiations were limited, they inspired a host of initiatives to accelerate development and economic cooperation in the Middle East, the most notable of which was the series of summits begun in Morocco in the end of October 1994.

All in all, by January 1996, the Middle East seemed like a promising place to live in. It was so promising that many Middle East countries began international campaigns to attract investments and tourism. The drive toward peace and prosperity, however, incited fear that interests in conflict and war would be severely damaged, and that ideologies of fundamentalism and fanaticism would rapidly grow obsolete. Opposition to peace in Israel and the Arab world congratulated itself. Seldom had terrorism been more effective at achieving its ends. *It has now become* an established pattern that, whenever there is any sign of progress in the peace process, an act of violence carried out by a minority on the Arab or the Israeli side takes place to stall or stop it all together.

We cannot contemplate this pattern and its effectiveness, however, without delving deeper into the structural deficiencies of the peace process, which allowed this pattern to emerge in the first place. Indeed, it is high time to rethink the process altogether.

These deficiencies can be summed up as follows:

First, the philosophy of the process is based on a gradual process of education: the Palestinian and Israeli peoples' ability to learn to coexist with each other. Opponents of the process on religious or historical grounds have had the opportunity to sabotage it at a very small cost on this basis. This deficiency is exacerbated by the fact that the current Israeli leadership was virulently opposed to the entire process until last year's elections in Israel. In fact, several members of the Israeli government continue to express this sentiment to this day. The net result has been dishonesty in implementing agreements, procrastination when agreements are reached, and compensations to *settlers* and Jewish religious fundamentalists when agreements are partially implemented. Because the goal of the negotiations remains undefined, small groups are able to endeavour to define the end results in *their own* existentialist terms, within the framework of *eretz* Israel.

The second deficiency is related to the frame of reference of the entire process, often ignored in the process of negotiations to reach and implement *agreements*. The international community has envisioned a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute since the Partition Resolution of 1947. In fact, the Israeli declaration of independence was clearly based on that *resolution*, which remains the only document in which Israel has accepted to define its borders. Security Council Resolution 242 explicitly established the principle of land for peace, according to which Israel must withdraw from *territories* it occupied in 1967 in exchange for a peace granting the Palestinians the right to self-determination — a principle that Israel accepted implicitly when it recognised the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

During the protracted negotiation process, however, Israel, more often than not ignores this frame of reference and acts as if the West Bank and Gaza and the Golan are disputed areas which it has the right to occupy and annex. Israel presents this right in terms of security, religion or economic concerns, depending on the occasion. Israeli settlement policy runs against all legal and moral principles recognised by the community of nations, has increased the influence of Jewish fundamentalists in Israeli society, and fanned the fire of Islamism in Palestinian society.

The third deficiency is related to the structural imbalance of power that provides the environment for the negotiations. Israel has secured conventional and non-conventional military superiority, a reality that has placed the peace process under the constant threat of an Israeli attack. Peace at Israeli gunpoint is the worst nightmare of Arab, and in particular Palestinian, national security. In interview after interview, the current Israeli prime minister defines Israeli peace with Arab countries, including Egypt, in terms of deterrence, power politics and Israeli military superiority, completely ignoring the notion of withdrawal from Arab territories as the basis for peace. Sometimes Netanyahu appears *to reverse the land-for-peace* formula in order to give Israel land, while the Arabs receive peace. This deficiency has weakened the peace process since the international community, taking note of this strategic imbalance, lets Israel get away with major violations of agreements that no party to other international conflicts could get away with, and demands concessions from the Palestinians that they cannot afford to make without strengthening fundamentalist forces.

The fourth deficiency is a direct result of the obsession of the current leadership and elites in the region with geo-politics over geo-economics. For them, history is always defined in terms of the past, not the future. There is no parallel in the Middle East to the founding fathers of the European Community. Even when Shimon Peres called for the creation of "a new Middle East", his ideas were mocked, not only throughout the Arab world, but also in Israel. Consequently, geo-economics in the peace process, in terms of multilateral negotiations or economic *conferences*, were dealt with as a concession to demand from Arab countries, a test of will for Israel, and an area of crisis management for other countries.

These four deficiencies, to mention only a few, have allowed the pattern of peace or conflict to take the *shape it has* acquired today in the Middle East. It is still possible to deal with them, if we take the following steps:

Fast-track negotiations for the permanent resolution of the Palestinian question on the basis of the two-states solution; the faithful implementation of the Oslo accords; a *moratorium on* all settlement activities; and the resolution of the settlement issue in the permanent status negotiations. The guiding principle for these negotiations should be the firm implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 and the land-for-peace formula.

Further steps include the immediate resumption of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, starting from the point reached in February 1996; a *crack-down on* all terrorist and fundamentalist organisations and their infrastructure in Palestinian territories and Israel. No one has the right to allow the canonisation of those who killed innocent civilians or insult the religion or *culture of others*.

Multilateral negotiations must be resumed with the aim of establishing a Middle East *economic community*, free of weapons of mass destruction; a regional mechanism to counter terrorism *must be set up* on the basis of decisions made at the Sharm El-Sheikh summit of March 1996.

These steps should allow the reversal of the current trend to make war, not peace. By speeding up the steps leading *to the* final status negotiations, it will be *possible to reduce the fundamentalists'* ability to sabotage the process. This will be possible only if the final goal for negotiations is explicitly stated and based on a two-state solution — in other words, the recognisation of the inevitability of a Palestinian state. The moratorium on the construction of settlements, the resumption of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as well as the multilateral negotiations, and the suppression of terrorism are prerequisites for the success of the Israeli-Palestinian *negotiations*.

Albright's initiative, declared early this month, does not fulfil these requirements. Her definition of terrorism is biased, and focuses almost exclusively on Israeli security requirements. In fact, when her representative, Dennis Ross, came to the region, he was mainly preoccupied with creating the mechanisms to safeguard Israeli security. He paid no attention to Palestinian needs for security from Jewish fundamentalist terrorism. In practice, protecting Israel from *terrorism has been a precondition* for any request that Israel refrain from taking unilateral steps that may prejudge the final status. Although Albright hinted that the accelerated final status negotiations should have a well defined goal, she refrained from defining what that goal would be. Moreover, Syria and Lebanon were totally absent from her remarks, except for the general reference to Resolution 242 and the land-for-peace formula.

It is possible, however, that Secretary Albright has decided not overload her agenda, preferring to take matters one step at a time. It is also possible that she will follow her many predecessors in taking a strong pro-Israeli stand in order to extract Israeli concessions. The problem here is that one-sided steps usually provide the perfect opportunity for opponents to peace. Any bias will always increase mistrust and lack of confidence in American mediation capabilities. It remains to be seen, however, which will triumph: Albright's ability to encompass all the elements of a serious peace-making endeavour in the region, or the strength of those opposing peace. *Let us* wait and see.

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Failing the twin tests

Can the US government bring pressure to bear on Israel? *More importantly, can the Likud make* peace? **James Zogby** assesses the reasons for pessimism



There are both positive and negative features to the US initiatives to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. On the negative side is the obvious shift in the logic of the Administration's approach to peace that underpinned both Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's speech and Ambassador Dennis Ross' mission to the Middle East.

*By decoupling political and security issues and priorit*ising the security dimension, the new US approach appears to mimic the line of the Netanyahu government. It also appears to undercut the very basis of the Madrid process first enunciated by President Bush in 1991. Bush called for simultaneous realisation of peace and security, terming the "realisation of Palestinian rights" and the "guarantees of Israel's security" the "twin tests for peace", both of which, he stated, were a function of each other and each of which must be achieved to ensure the other.

While US officials now insist that the Palestinian Authority (PA) must act first to provide Israel's security, they both privately and publicly suggest that such a position is *necessary both to restore trust with the Israeli body politic* and to provide political cover for US pressure on Israel to stop settlement construction and enter final-status negotiations in good faith.

The need for "political cover" is, of course, a reference to the increasingly anti-Palestinian and anti-peace positions being taken by the US Congress and the majority of mainstream US Jewish organisations. These groups have increasingly sharpened their attack on the Palestinian Authority and President Arafat, not only pressing Israel's demands *but even going so far as to accuse the PNA of* complicity in the recent bombing attacks.

While the administration's position on the security question, therefore, might seem to be a necessary and pragmatic stance — as one official noted, "we can only help push the Israelis if Arafat helps us" — it is dangerous as well.

First, by focusing on the alleged Palestinian failure in the security area, the administration fuels an argument they are seeking to defuse — namely, that Arafat's failings in this area make him somehow responsible for the bombings in Jerusalem.

Second, by itemising, as the secretary of state did, the *steps* the US *is requiring* the PA to take — namely, *in*creased information sharing and cooperation with Israeli agencies, detecting and deterring future terrorist acts, seizing arms, arresting those accused of terrorism (and not releasing them) and "destroying the infrastructure of terrorism" — the US is both placing unrealistic de*mands* on the PA and setting Palestinian officials up for failure.

The compromise worked out by Ambassador Ross may produce a more acceptable approach to moving forward on the security issue than what was demanded by the Israelis or what was initially outlined by Secretary Albright. With the establishment of a tripartite panel consisting of CIA, Shin Bet and Preventive Security representatives to vet information and evaluate progress, the Palestinians may not be subjected to unilateral Israeli demands or judgements. Moderated by the CIA, such a panel might allow the US to make its own assessment of the Palestinians' performance in security matters. If the US initiative is, in fact, a good-faith effort to ease the Palestinians' security burden, and if the Palestinian Authority can make what the US views as a "reasonable effort" to improve the security situation, the Israelis may not be fully satisfied but the US could still note "positive results", thereby allowing the secretary of state's political mission to begin.

The US standard for positive results must, however, be *lower than* either the Israeli demands or the items outlined in the Secretary's speech, since the PA is in no political position to take those extreme measures.

Another danger in separating security and political issues is the power such separation gives to extremist groups that would use terror to sabotage the peace process. Given the new logic of "security first", each terrorist action plays right into the hands of the Israeli and Palestinian extremists who want to end the process.

A final concern that must be noted as resulting from this division has been a deepening Arab concern with, and even distrust of, the US role and the commitment of the Clinton administration to pursue an evenhanded approach to the peace process. While the US is focused on rebuilding Israeli-Palestinian trust and neutralising Israeli (and US right-wing) opposition to a just peace, it has severely weakened its standing in the Arab world.

Some Arab American leaders raised these concerns with the secretary of state the morning of her speech. We urged her to avoid playing the "blame game" with President Arafat, to maintain the *link* between security and political progress, not to press the Palestinians to do more than they were politically able to do, and not to press them to take measures that would re*sult in a further erosion* of human rights. She insisted that the political issues would be addressed and that she would press the Israelis against unilateral acts that violated the very logic of a negotiating process. All she was requiring, she insisted, was that the security environment be improved and security cooperation restored before she began her political mission.

These positions were elaborated in discussions with White House and State Department officials following Ambassador Ross's mission *to the Middle East, which* revealed much the same positions. These officials repeated their insistence that the PA must show real efforts on the security front as a prerequisite to further movement in the process.

They said that, prior to the Jerusalem bombing, the administration was working on an initiative to press the Israelis on settlements and other issues so as to restart talks. At the same time, they said, they were warning the PA to move on security issues since there was concern that a bombing attack would derail US efforts.

Following the Jerusalem bombing attack, these administration officials concluded that security must be addressed first, so that the Secretary can begin her political mission. They insist that if the security test is passed, the Secretary will bring real pressure to bear on Israel to stop settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and to *fulfill agreements on the port* and airport for Gaza and the West Bank-Gaza safe passage route.

At the same time, these officials made it clear that the US engagement in final status talks will be real and substantive. They pointed to the president and secretary of state's assertions that the peace process must be a two-way street, and noted that the US *will bring to the* negotiating table a vision of what both sides should do to move final status talks to a successful conclusion.

Several questions remain, however. Assuming that the security tests are passed and the secretary, in fact, comes to the region, how vigorous will she be in pressuring the Israelis to make meaningful concessions to restore Palestinian confidence? Will US sensitivities to domestic politics and internal Israeli politics allow for real public pressure on Israel?

If the US plan to speed up final status talks is to be a serious effort to reach a settlement, how engaged would the US be in the process? Since the Palestinians lack any meaningful leverage in negotiations, how assertive will the US be in assisting them to achieve their minimal national aspirations? Will the Palestinians be left alone at the table to face the Netanyahu dictate of an "Alon-Plus" plan as their future? Or will the US be as assertive in insisting on the Palestinian right to full sovereignty and security as they have been in pressing Arabs to recognise Israel's sovereignty and security?

One final major question: even if the US presses Israel and delivers on its commitment to ensure that the peace process is a two-way street, *will the* Netanyahu government meet the minimum Palestinian requirements on settlements, statehood, Jerusalem, refugees and land and water rights?

With regard to the Likud government's ability to make peace, I have serious doubts. With regard to the US role, *I may not be as pessimistic as some, but* I'll need to see clear signs of follow-through before I can be listed as an optimist.

The writer is the president of the Washington-based ArabAmerican Institute.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Peace by abuse

It took Israeli officials less than a few hours to back down on their initial decision not to retaliate against the Hizbollah attacks on Israel this week. Never mind that the attacks by the Iranian-backed militant group came in response to an all-out assault on the southern Lebanese town of Sidon by the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA) — Israel's main lackeys. Also, never mind that the attack, which likely came with Israeli blessings, is a violation of the April 1996 agreement that fighting in Lebanon would not take place in civilian areas.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu voiced concern over the SLA's attack, arguing that Israel does not condone "violence directed against civilians"! But the April agreement came about as a result of Israeli attacks on a UN refugee camp in Qena that month, which left over 100 civilians dead.

Moreover, the economic sanctions imposed on the Palestinians in the name of security as a result of the Jerusalem bombing, hardly paint a picture of Netanyahu as a humanitarian. The collective punishments went into force despite the fact that there is no evidence to link any Palestinian to this attack which was executed with the same plastic explosive used in the bomb that exploded in the Lawrence Hotel last year in Jerusalem. The bomber in that incident entered Israel on a fake British passport.

All that seems to concern the hawkish Netanyahu is that Arafat impose a policy of mass arrests. Due process be damned, in the Israeli premier's eyes, if you have a beard, you are a terrorist and should be locked away.

This is the condition and prerequisite to the resumption of the negotiations. And, according to Netanyahu, it is also required under the Oslo Accords — an agreement he has so blatantly violated in spirit and action that even the mere mention of it is ridiculous hypocrisy.

It is, in fact, almost as ridiculous as calling the US the honest broker of peace after Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told Arafat to shape up or she would not come to the region.

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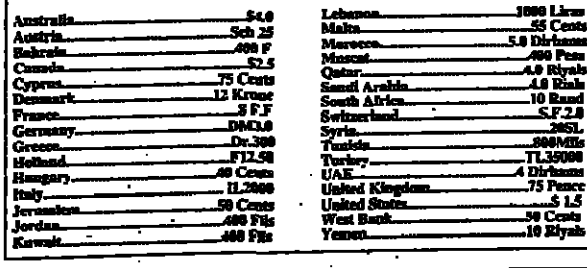
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Greece	Dr.300	Syria	20SL
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Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL35000
Italy	IL2000	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals





Questioning enlightenment

While the old Islamic discourse may have reflected a naive infatuation with Western civilisation, writes Abdelwahab Elmessiri in the second part of this series, the bearers of a new way of thinking discovered a tainted modernity, embroiled in crises and questions of its own

Whereas partial secularism recognises the validity and importance of values on the moral level, and the idea of totality on the epistemological level, comprehensive secularism denies them, as it denies the very idea of transcendence. Many of the negative aspects of Western modernity, which were to become more or less recurrent patterns or central phenomena, were isolated events that could be overlooked easily. Furthermore, the Western critique of modernity and the Enlightenment had not yet crystallised, in spite of the fact that voices of protest were growing stronger.

Western Romantic literature, for instance, is in essence a protest against the negative aspects of Western modernity. The writings of some conservative Western thinkers, such as Edmund Burke, include references to many of the topics developed later by the Western critical discourse on modernity. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of modern Western civilisation, whether at the level of theory or of practice, were not yet obvious to observers or students of this civilisation.

For the bearers of the new Islamic discourse, the situation is quite different. The '50s were the intellectual formative years of the majority: their first encounter with modern Western civilisation took place in the '60s, at a time when Western modernity had already entered the stage of crisis, and when many Western thinkers had begun to realise the dimensions of this crisis and the impasse Western modernity had reached.

The bearers of the new Islamic discourse realised, from the very beginning, the darker aspects of Western modernity. It had embroiled the entire world in two Western wars, called "world wars" because the whole world was dragged into the arena of conflict. In time of "peace", the world was caught up in a frenzied arms race. The centralised nation-state, growing stronger and more authoritarian, expanded, reached the most private aspects of man's life, and, through its sophisticated security and educational apparatus, tried to "guide" its citizens. The media, another by-product of Western modernity, invaded the private lives of citizens, accelerating the process of standardisation and escalating the consumerist fever. In the meantime, the pleasure sector became so powerful as to control people's dreams, selling them erotic utopias if not pornography. The family as a social institution could not sustain the pressure; divorce rates sky-rocketed, reaching levels rarely witnessed before.

The crisis of meaning, the epistemological crisis, anomie, alienation and reification became more pronounced. The liberal capitalist project ceased to be a smashing success story: the socialist experiment collapsed and lost any vestige of credibility. Anti-humanist intellectual trends such as fascism, Nazism, Zionism and structuralism emerged, reaching a climax in post-modernist thought.

By the mid-'60s, the Western critique of modernity had crystallised and the works of the Frankfurt School thinkers had become widely available and popular. Many studies critical of the age of the Enlightenment were published. Writing about the standardisation that resulted from Western modernity and its one-dimensional man, Herbert Marcuse sought to demonstrate the existence of a structural defect at the very heart of modern Western civilisation in its totality, a defect that goes beyond the traditional division of this civilisation into a socialist and a capitalist camp. Many revisionist historians, rewriting the history of modern Western civilisation, tried to underscore the enormity of the crimes committed against the peoples of Asia and Africa and of the colonial pillage of their lands. Many studies, radically critical of development theories, appeared during the same period. The New Left movement made a significant contribution in this regard.

Thus, whether on the level of practice or that of theory, it was not difficult for the bearers of the new Islamic discourse, those who studied Western modernity in the middle of the twentieth century, to recognise many of its shortcomings and to see it in its totality. It was no longer possible for them to experience a naive infatuation of the type experienced by the intellectuals of the first generation. The Western modernity they knew, experienced and studied was, in many aspects, different from the Western modernity known, experienced and studied by the pioneers' generation.

Neither the new nor the old generation of Muslim intellectuals constructed their respective intellectual systems on the exclusive basis of the Islamic world-view, however. Their interaction with Western modernity was a very important formative factor. After all, this was a civilisation that had acquired centrality by virtue of its economic and military accomplishments, put forward its own view of the world as if it were the view of all human beings at all times and in all places, conceived of its knowledge as a precise science applicable to all communities, and set the challenge to which everyone else had to respond.

Responses varied with the type of challenge and its intensity. The early reformists found many positive aspects in Western modernity. One may even go as far as suggesting that they were entranced by it. This is evident from Sheikh Mohamed Abduh's oft-quoted remark that "whereas in the West he found Muslims without Islam, in the East he found Islam without Muslims". He meant that in the West, he found people who manifested in their conduct the ideals of Islam, although they were not Muslims, whereas in the Muslim world, he found people who believed in Islam, but belied their belief through their conduct.

Consequently, the fundamental issue for many of the bearers of the old Islamic discourse was how to reconcile Islam with Western modernity, and even how to bring Islam up to date and up to par. This was the core of Mohamed Abduh's project, a project which continued to dominate until the mid-1960s of this century.

The writer is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University.

The Middle East in a shrinking world

The following article is Mohamed Sid-Ahmed's contribution to a seminar to be held next week in Italy on the impact of globalism on regional conflicts

I am invited to a conference in Italy next week on Globalism, Regionalism and Federalism but, because of previous commitments, will unfortunately be unable to attend. However, in lieu of a paper presented to the conference, I will be sending this article which raises a question I believe to be central to the Middle East dilemma, namely, to what extent can the Arab-Israeli conflict retain its specific features and remain unaffected by the fundamental changes that are sweeping the contemporary world following the collapse of the bipolar world order?

The question is particularly pertinent at a time conflict in the Middle East seems to have lost none of its intensity and acuteness unlike other similarly intractable conflicts, such as Ulster for instance, which seem to be heading towards some kind of settlement.

However, there are signs that appearances could be deceptive, or at least misleading. One surprising development in recent days was the visit of a 40-man delegation of Arab Israelis to Syria and their meeting with Hafez Al-Assad. The Syrian president has so far avoided any direct contact with Israelis. It can be argued, of course, that the visitors are all Palestinians who resisted abandoning their land and country when Israel was created in 1948. However, seven of them are members of the Knesset, a basic institution of the Israeli state. Moreover, one is a member of the Israeli Labour Party, another of Meretz, both Zionist parties. In the past, Arab Israelis were regarded with suspicion by other Arabs as potential Israeli agents. Judging from the warm welcome Damascus accorded the Arab Israeli delegation, this is no longer the case. It seems that even the staunchest proponents of the total boycott line are now willing to resort to face-saving devices that would facilitate openings to Israel. Paradoxically, this comes at a time the Israeli government is adopting its most hawkish line ever, an attitude which in other circumstances would have prompted a tightening of the boycott, not the opposite.

Another development that would have been inconceivable only a few years ago is the Copenhagen meeting. I refused to sign the Copenhagen Declaration not only because I had reservations concerning both its content and its procedural aspect, but also because I did not agree to describing the gathering as an 'alliance'. But I am not opposed in principle to selective meetings between Arab and Israeli intellectuals, if only because overdoing a line of total boycott can have adverse effects and expose Arab parties as adopting double standards.

Indeed, I have often met with Israelis because I believe that it is totally inconsistent to talk about peace, or to concede that a process attributed to the objective of peace (or even to the less uplifting one of reaching some form of settlement) is underway and then insist on totally boycotting Israelis whatever the circumstances. If peace can be the objective, the other party must be known *subjectively*, via direct contact, and not only *objectively*, in terms of reports made by third parties.

The alternative to conceding that a peace process is underway is to go on calling for the elimination, ideological if not material, of the opponent. That approach could have prevailed during the Cold War, both globally and regionally. At the global level, the most glaring manifestation of mutual exclusion between the protagonists was the confrontation between communism and capitalism. At the regional level, the confrontation between Zionism and pan-Arabism was also marked by mutual exclusiveness. Now that mutual exclusiveness at the global level has disappeared, can it be maintained at the regional level? Moreover, globalism implies a network of economic ties extending to the entire globe. How can this be made compatible with mutual exclusion?

Throughout the Cold War, the assertion of Self, on both sides of the confrontation line, presupposed the elimination of the Other. Today it is assumed that all conflicts should be solved by peaceful means, which presupposes that the Other will not be eliminated. Thus the definitions of self, identity, patrimony, etc., acquire new dimensions. They assume the ability to accommodate, rather than exclude, the Other. Which means that self is seen as complex and multi-layered, with a central core to which are superimposed other layers representing the impact of Others who are to be accommodated. The identity of the Other thus becomes, for every protagonist, part of his own concerns, his own identity. In a way, the Other, which cannot be eliminated or removed from the global village, is 'interiorised'. Identity thus reflects relations that acquire the character of an interlocking web, rather than of two mutually exclusive poles. It is a totally different rationale from that which prevailed during the Cold War. That is why Netanyahu's premise that Israel's security should enjoy absolute priority over any other consideration is an anachronism that is reminiscent of the past and incompatible with the present approach to conflict resolution.

In the face of Netanyahu's intransigence, the Arab policy of boycotting Israelis cannot, and should not, be abandoned altogether. Even Arafat, for whom access by Palestinian workers to jobs in Israel is an economic, and hence political, imperative, is sometimes forced to call for the boycott of certain Israeli 'luxury' commodities when Israeli abuses in the name of security concerns reach unacceptable levels.

The most serious challenge at this juncture is not so much the traditional pattern of the Arab Israeli conflict resisting new patterns of post-Cold War political conduct, but rather the opposite which could be the subject of many surprises in the not so distant future. Economic globalism within the framework of the new GATT agreements is acquiring tremendous momentum, not only at the global level, but even in regional settings, including the Middle East. Netanyahu's hopes of totally liquidating the Palestinian problem are based on the assumption that many Arab capitals will eventually come to see that Tel Aviv could be a more effective go-between than either Riyadh or Cairo when it comes to ensuring their integration into the new globalist economy, in exchange for a 'solution' of the Palestinian problem that is more cosmetic than real. The economic conference to be held in Doha next November will be a testing ground for this hypothesis. So far, even Saudi Arabia has decided to boycott the conference. For even if it considers that it is the Palestinian Authority more than any other party that is responsible for Palestine, the Saudi leadership cannot remain silent in the face of Israel's flagrant violation of Arab-Islamic rights in Jerusalem.

The Arab parties have as yet not properly assessed the impact of global change on their conflict with Israel, thus exposing themselves to inconsistencies that are thoroughly detrimental to their cause. It is high time such shortcomings are addressed before it is too late.

Justice of sorts

By Naguib Mahfouz

Hooliganism has been around forever. When we were children in the popular quarters, we would often see pitched battles between two groups of strong men or thugs. But as soon as a policeman arrived on the scene, the fight would come to an abrupt halt. You would see a scrawny little policeman, fresh off the train from the countryside, ordering gigantic men about, as if herding a flock of sheep.

I witnessed the end of the era of hooliganism, and I saw the thugs who were a terrifying sight to contemplate when they had worked up a rage during their fights. A policeman would always intervene, however, shouting "Quickly march to the El-Wayli police station!" The policemen carried no weapons, but commanded respect to a degree you cannot imagine. This made it possible for us to stroll fearlessly, late at night, in the empty streets of Abbassiya.

The situation is obviously very different today. The strong men of the past would never have thought of attacking the forces of law and order, but now I hear that security forces are being attacked. This is entirely unacceptable.

I condemn organised violence, whether it takes the form of terrorism or that of hooliganism. But the confrontation in which we must engage must include the development and improvement of the judicial system. Lengthy litigation processes lead many people to despair of ever seeing justice done, and therefore some resort to extrajudicial means in order to obtain what they believe is their right.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Interior passions

Al-Ahram: "The violent campaign launched by *Al-Shaab* newspaper against the minister of interior poses many questions... We are not party to this quarrel in any way but we would like to inquire whether it is linked to the great success of the minister against violent and terrorist factions... We do not wish to defend the minister and do not object to criticism of him or his policies so long as such criticism constitutes genuine opposition and is not an attempt to settle scores between the minister and a certain political trend. Keeping this in mind, we would like to ask whether this campaign is just another episode in the ongoing terrorist offensive against the security apparatus which has been fighting a fierce battle against religious violence and terrorism."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 12 August)

Al-Gomhuria: "The report put out by The Associated Press recently is the best answer to the ferocious campaign the Egyptian security authorities are being subjected to. The AP report said that Egypt's stability is unassailable and that the extremists who once appeared to have the upper hand are now divided. Had the security authorities been in any way corrupt, such excellent results would not have been possible. In any case, the police has the trust of the people, and this is the ultimate trust."
(Samir Ragab, 14 August)

Al-Shaab: "The statements of the interior minister reveal how much he is trying to divert attention to hide his guilt. He is twisting facts and changing the topic of discussion to that of terror, the Muslim Brotherhood and the religious trend. And we will not stoop to getting into a debate with him over these weighty political matters. The simple fact is that we have caught the minister red-handed in acts of theft, bribery and abuse of authority. He should answer the charges against him. Only when this is done, we may discuss other political matters."
(Editorial, 15 August)

Al-Akhbar: "The national forces who seek stability and development should not stand idly by in the face of the horrendous press campaign waged by *Al-Shaab*. This is a new terrorist move in Egypt's war against terrorism. We denounce this paper which airs the views of Hassan El-Turabi, Osama Bin Ladin, Saddam Hussein and the ayatollahs of Iran and everyone who fights those who fight terrorism. We are required to take a decisive stand. Otherwise, no one will be safe from terrorism. Terrorism will not scare us, particularly the media terror which has directed its venom against the interior minister but has wider schemes."
(Wagih Abu Zikry, 15 August)

Al-Arabi: "Ministers are entitled to sue papers which they believe libel them. This is their constitutional right. It also guarantees that they will be less tempted to abuse their authority to seek revenge. Yet, tensions between the press and the government should be resolved within a democratic framework. The press is entitled to criticise public figures in order to promote the public good. So long as the criticism is not made out of a personal desire for revenge or blackmail, it should be considered legitimate."
(Salah Eissa, 18 August)

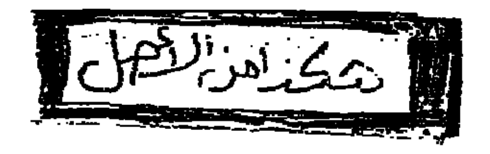
Al-Usbooe: "No one can take a decision to shut down *Al-Shaab*. This should never be permitted under any circumstances as it would set a dangerous precedent for which we would all pay dearly. But no one can blame the interior minister, as an Egyptian citizen and a public figure, for taking legal action against the paper. The case is a delicate one and we do not want to pass a judgement one way or the other while the matter is in the hands of the judiciary, which we all trust."
(Mustafa Bakry, 18 August)

Al-Wafd: "The problem is that we always detect the faults when it is too late. Nothing works properly and we do not have the means to prevent catastrophes from happening. The recent fire in the Horreya Mall was a catastrophe that exposed our ineptness. The mall is a commercial centre visited by thousands of people daily, yet the electrical system was faulty. There was no one to check it and so the catastrophe occurred."
(Abbas El-Tarabili, 18 August)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Mahatma Gandhi is back after 50 years. As India celebrates independence, he seems to loom everywhere, larger than life. The face of a sainted man, the principles of peaceful resistance by which he abided: have these been forgotten today, when every new day brings a 'new explosion of hatred? As I drew him, I felt I was sculpting a laughing bronze statue, dressed in the loincloth he wore to visit the Queen of England, his eyes crinkled in merriment behind his small round spectacles. As India rejoices, I, too, think of Gandhi's patient, intractable desire to rid his country of the British.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Arafat's vacation

Even some Jewish American analysts are now admitting the flagrant contradictions to which US policy has fallen prey. Under the pretext of seeking to resolve the current crisis in the so-called peace process, US policy has become part of the problem, and one of the factors contributing to its complication. It has increased anger and resentment in the Arab world, directed not so much toward Israel as toward Washington.

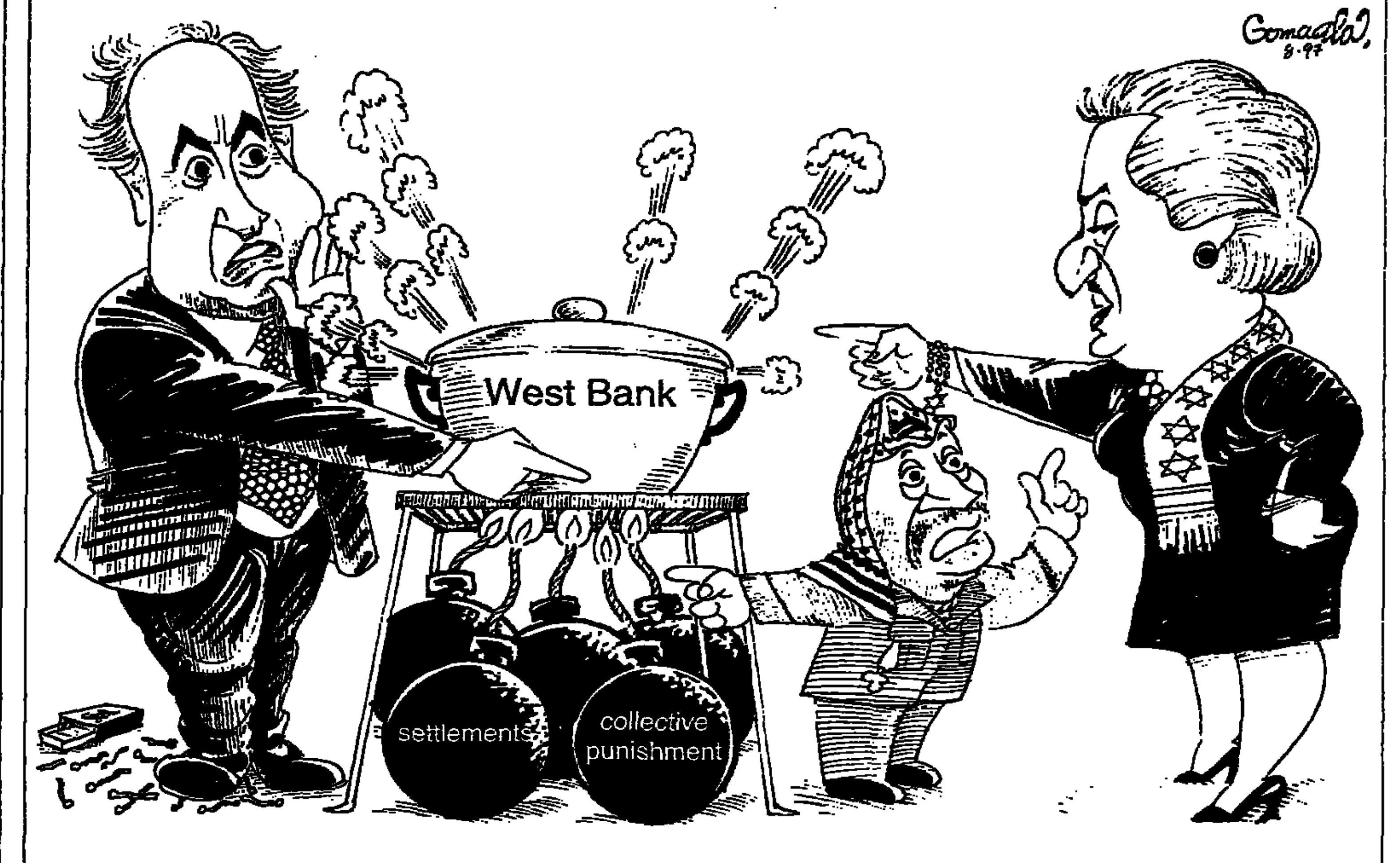
This contradiction is very clear in the American move that came after months of passive reaction, and waiting in vain for some positive development. The futile wait triggered acts of violence that were not limited to the bombing in Jerusalem. The US administration ultimately chose to give complete support to Netanyahu's policies. At the same time, it exerted unprecedented efforts to impose on Arafat and the Palestinian Authority the precondition of security coordination between Palestinian and Israeli agencies under the supervision of the CIA, without even broaching the pending political problems of the Oslo agreement.

This means, according to Jewish American writer Steven Rosenfeld, that the rules governing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have changed. The talks are no longer about land for peace; nor are they about the two sides negotiating the return of land to the Palestinians in order to allow both sides to establish normal relations, and thereby assure Israel's security. At present, all that is required of the Palestinians is to exert maximum effort to prevent terrorism, and crack down on terrorists. Only when that has been accomplished will they be given, in return, a little piece of land intersected by Israeli roads and settlements, in order to prevent such grave breaches of Israeli security as a young boy throwing a small stone.

President Mubarak clearly stated that America should not bring so much pressure to bear on Arafat, and leave Netanyahu free to decide when, whether or how he intends to fulfil his commitments.

The present situation may not preclude security coordination; nor, however, does it prevent explosions of violence, particularly under the economic sanctions imposed by Israel, such as blocking the financial remittances due to the PA, maintaining the blockade, and bringing living conditions to rock bottom. All those measures may be considered as a direct invitation to the Palestinians to revolt and rebel against their leadership, against the enforced security coordination, and against peace itself. The US administration should not be surprised if they find, among the desperate young men attempting to enter the US, immigrants who would not hesitate at carrying out violent acts in American cities or on military bases.

President Clinton has taken a vacation, after having been apprised of the mission results reported by the American envoy, Dennis Ross. Netanyahu is also on vacation, assured that the CIA is supervising security coordination procedures. Albright has postponed her visit to the region pending results that justify her undertaking such a tour. Only Arafat has stayed put. But what if he, too, were to take a vacation, leaving this situation behind him, after Netanyahu's success in preempting the efforts of the Egyptian, Jordanian and European sides?



Soapbox

An end to injustice

The landlord-tenant law passed by the People's Assembly in June 1992 will end the great injustice done to landowners which has always caused tense relations with their tenants. It represents a reversion to true justice and market economy mechanisms. It fulfils the rights of both landowners and tenants and establishes more just and balanced relations which considers the interests of both parties. If the revenues from one feddan are more than LE1,000, is it just that the landlord should receive only LE20 or 30? The new law has raised the rent of agricultural land to about 50 per cent of land revenues, and has allowed a five-year grace period before full implementation to allow both landlords and tenants to adjust. During this time, any evicted tenant has the right to receive compensation from the landowner.

Two very important points remain. First, *shari'a* as the main source of our constitution, does not condone unlimited rental contracts. Any contract must be based on freedom and mutual consent. Second, according to the *shari'a*, sharing revenues is the best, most just solution to such a problem.

I am sure that landlords and tenants will remain on good terms, since the new law and the liberalisation of rents will create a more balanced relationship which takes the interest of both parties into consideration. Very soon, all these arguments and conflicts will come to nothing and things will fall into place.



This week's Soapbox speaker is chairman of the parliamentary agricultural committee and former minister of public works and water resources.

Essam Radi

The Fayed feeding frenzy

The Dodi and Di saga, writes **Edward Said**, has revealed nothing so much as the profound racism of the British media. The tabloids have had a field day of racist fantasy and sexual voyeurism

British tabloids are known for their shrill, often hysterical treatment of celebrities who seem to exist mainly to provide the tabloids and their readers with an unending series of scandals. The most potent of the scandals is usually some mix of sex and politics, in which "revelations" are made, confessions obtained, and justice (such as it is) served on the supposed offender. In reality, of course, the main purpose of scandal is to excite readers for whom existence is drab routine, endless subway journeys, nagging concerns about bills and health. An item about the film star Hugh Grant and a Hollywood call girl, or Eddie Murphy and a transvestite prostitute, or one of the Rainier children and a paramour, can provoke paroxysms of sensational headlines and seemingly interminable coverage, all for entertainment, rather than news, purposes. Most of the affected personalities are too embarrassed or exhausted to pursue libel suits against the tabloids, since striking back at the journalists and their papers seems to provide the latter with even more publicity and sensation.

The frightening thing about the media feeding frenzy that surrounds a celebrity caught in flagrante delicto is that it is so concentrated and intense, as if there is no other news to be reported. In the US, coverage of the two OJ Simpson trials went on day after day without significant interruption for months on end. An army of reporters, photographers and film crews camped outside the courthouse, and near Simpson's house, with a relentless endurance that was quite simply terrifying. Even the so-called quality media turned themselves into Simpson-watchers, thereby creating a new industry for experts, lawyers, voyeurs, psychiatrists, family friends, and gossip columnists who were called on to supply additional commentary, explanation, information. Thanks to the miracles of modern electronic communication a breaking news story can be covered instantly and on the spot, with no corner of the globe and no dark secret distant and obscure enough to remain hidden for long. Even the most violent and disturbing of calamities, like the Gulf War or one of the Rwandan massacres, is transformed from human disaster into media event.

The core of all media sensationalism is, as Shakespeare put it succinctly in *Troilus and Cressida*, money and sex. And where are both easier to get hold of than at that intersection of celebrity and prurience which has recently overtaken British fancy as it has probed, fondled, imagined, and strung out the romance of the already too exposed Princess Di and Dodi (i.e. Emad) Fayed, son of one of Britain's most wealthy and visible financiers and flamboyant personalities, Mohamed Fayed. One would have thought that Di's romantic exploits might have sated the British appetite for disapproving, but strongly fixated, attention to illicit, or at least out of the ordinary, sex; one scarcely needs a reminder that, more than any other society, England's has punished and at the same time given exceptional prominence to extramarital, homosexual, and sadomasochistic sex (*le vice anglais* is one contribution) that exceeds anything France or the Scandinavians do. The British have a way of turning love into smut that is uniquely theirs. Princess Di obviously is exceptional even by British standards. Quite shrewdly she has taken on and finally, I think, defeated the dysfunctional and by now comic royal family, and has elevated herself to the status of icon, mostly by careful press manipulation. Everyone now knows everything there is to know about her adultery, her eating disorders, her grudges against Charles and his Neanderthal relatives, her ambitions and her desire "to be happy." All in all, very little about Diana is princess-like, or even admirable: she has the tastes of a shopgirl and the affectations that come from reading too many cheap romances and gossip columns. But she obviously has a will of steel and a disproportionately large ego, both of which are, it would seem, constantly looking for new amusement and thrills.

Enter the Fayeds *père et fils*. Rarely has the British press, including its most respectable organs like the *Sunday Times* (now a Rupert Murdoch publication, with all that that implies in the way of sleaze and super-conservatism), indulged in such an orgy of racist fantasy and sexual peeping tom-ism as when "poor" unhappy Diana was discovered and courted by Dodi Fayed. It was as if every threadbare Orientalist cliché about "fabled" Oriental wealth and sexual prowess was marshalled to conquer (read "violate") the blond English snow fairy. Although all the fancy couple seems to have done is to travel on the Fayed yacht, go swimming and occasionally embrace (for the cameras of course), you would have thought that various nightmare scenarios had been realised. It was also suggested that poor Dodi was just a front for his father, and that the energetic Diana was more interested in Fayed the father than in his playboy son. The stately *Times* concluded its quite ponderous report as follows: "Does he [Fayed senior] hope that William's coronation, in however many decades' time, will have an Alexandrian air due to the dark-eyed presence of the new king's half-siblings Cleo and Mo, the dashing children of Dodi and Di? And will old Grandpa Mohamed, the match-maker, be there himself, rubbing his hands in victory?"

This is pure Arab- and Muslim-bashing of the crudest sort. What is extraordinary about it is that it comes from a society that prides itself on its civilised values and generally looks down on non-Europeans for their crudeness and lack of refinement. This is not to say that the Fayeds are innocent victims. Mohamed has made no secret of his power, nor of his capacity for playing the media and politics game, usually with some brilliance. His well-timed interventions certainly contributed to the undoing of Jonathan Aitken last June, a man whose cupidity and arrogance in the end brought him a well-deserved public disgrace. But Fayed has been shamelessly treated by the British establishment, which has denied him citizenship on the flimsiest grounds and has flayed him in public whenever he has got too close to one or another centre of power. To look at what has been said about him in the British media is to note that what is most held against him is that he is an Egyptian and a Muslim, as if for that particular identity only certain limits are tolerated, not others. Fayed's crime is that he is too good at playing the game of power and influence, too good, that is, for what used to be called (and sometimes still is) a WOG. Dodi's crime is that he is an Arab playboy, a class of individuals I don't have any regard for, but whose sexuality seems to the British public to be both threatening and attractive. And that such a person should touch Princess Di's smooth white skin is anathema.

It is when gossip turns into racialism and the worst kind of gutter voyeurism that it says more about the people writing and reading it than it does about its objects. The easiest thing for a lazy mind to do is to fall back on hackneyed stereotypes — the lusty sheikh, the violated British virgin, the evil bazaar-trader rubbing his scabrous hands together in voluptuous glee as his scion effectively takes over British royalty. It always ends up being us-versus-them: "we" are always well-intentioned, upright and much exploited, while "they" are unscrupulous, malign and underhanded. The surprising thing this time is that so far as the British media is concerned all the gloves are off, and nothing is left either to understatement or to the raising of eyebrows. Arabs and Muslims remain a choice target because, if the truth be told, we have not taken seriously enough the hostility that exists towards us as a people, despite the enormous amount of oil and arms money the Arabs have shovelled out to countries like Britain, which remains dependent on such largesse. The problem is a cultural one, and it can only be remedied by cultural means, not by being more conciliatory to and dependent on a fantasised (or demonised) White Man whom we seem either anxious to please or to attack indiscriminately. Who knows whether Dodi and Di will live happily ever after? They certainly seem to deserve each other, but that is more a matter of money and power than it is of either religion or race. Meanwhile, the British press sinks further and further, churning its wheels on air, stoking the fires of prejudice and race hatred, disgracing itself and the society it mirrors.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Spartacus rising

While forensic experts in Santa Cruz were confirming that skeleton no. 2, unearthed in the Bolivian village of Vallegrande, belonged to the legendary revolutionary Che Guevara, the streets of Giza — close to the Cairo Zoo — were witnessing a guerrilla war of a different sort. The battle of Americana was being fought with knives, chains and pipes. An innocent "civilian", a barber in his early twenties, was killed and many were badly injured, including a staggering five police officers and seven rank-and-file policemen.

Two events: one momentous, awe-inspiring and dramatic, the other mean and sordid: one — it is safe to say — is even now being recorded in the annals of human history, and the other will most likely be forgotten, even in Egypt, in a few weeks. As disparate events, they have nothing in common, and the reader has every right to wonder why they are linked. As symbolic representations, however, the concomitance of the two events begs reflection. And whichever way you look at it, there is a great deal of symbolism here.

Does the discovery of Che's bones and their return to his adopted revolutionary home, impoverished and besieged Cuba, signify a final burial of the spirit of revolution and liberation in the Third World? Has a globalising, post-modern world "tamed the anti-imperialist tiger and turned him into a rebel without claws," transforming him into "a hip advertising pitchman... [whose] image is being used to sell everything from rock music and designer clothes to Swatch watches and Fischer skis", as *Newsweek* claims? Or does it rather signify that the ghost of the inveterate revolutionary will not go away *despite* the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the staggering US/Western victory in the Cold War, and the apparently incontrovertible triumph of the market?

Does the significance of Che's continuing ability to fire the imagination of different people in widely different parts of the world lie in the fact that oppressed and humiliated people have not been sufficiently cowed by the harbingers of "the end of history", and have still not given up on their dreams of emancipation? Are there really people in different parts of the world who have still not swallowed post-modern cynicism, who still believe in human will and human agency, in humanity rather than in exclusivist and warring ethnicities and cultural identities, in the possibility of a moral man, a moral society, and a moral world?

The questions are many, and so are the diverse answers. Two aspects of the symbolism invested in the figure of Che stand out, in my view. Che's murder in the Bolivian bush, insofar as it expressed, almost immediately, the defeat of the armed peasant revolution he hoped to help lead to victory, was an expression of a much wider process. That process could be recognised only through hindsight. Indeed, if anything, the years that followed Che's death in 1967 seemed to run counter to the ultimate fruition of that process, to belie its creeping, if firmly rooted, realisation.

The years that followed Che's death seemed to vindicate his dream, even if that dream had turned ugly in his own eyes in the Congo and was defeated, at the cost of his life, in Bolivia: '68 was yet to come, so was the Cultural Revolution in China, and so, of course, was the greatest triumph of them all, the NLF victory in Vietnam — a victory so complete, it was embodied in the chilling images, broadcast on television screens throughout the world, of US officials and soldiers fleeing by helicopters off the roof of the American Embassy in Saigon, soon after Ho Chi Minh City.

However we explain the momentous events of those years, we now know that, even as youths and students from the US to Japan were launching their great rebellions, as armed national liberation and peasant revolutions from Latin America to South-East Asia were threatening pro-Western regimes with the "domino" effect, the foundations of a new age were being laid. And within the extremely short time it took for "the youth" to become barely middle-aged, that new age, adopting for itself the name of "globalisation", proclaimed its virtually uncontested triumph as "the end of history", mocking their struggles, sacrifices and great dreams as, at best, so much foolishness.

The theorist of Guevarism and the author of a manual for armed insurrection, Regis Dupré, renounces his *focus* and becomes an advisor to Mitterrand. SDS militants become repentant Yuppies, the great domino victories of South-East Asia are wiped out in the killing fields of Cambodia, and everywhere, everyone — conservatives, socialists, reformed and unreformed communists — pays homage to the market. A change of government appears more and more redundant, as does the exercise of popular will: A renowned *dependista* theorist becomes president in Brazil, socialists regain power in most of Western Europe, reformed communists jump back into the saddle in much of Eastern Europe, Kabila seizes power by force of arms in Zaire/Congo, and in China, the Chinese Communist Party defies all predictions of its imminent downfall, and actually consolidates its hold on power. But in the age of globalisation, the omnipresent might of "the market" reigns over them all, putting strict limitations on the choices available to rulers and ruled, electorates and politicians seeking election, rebellious populations and rebel leaders.

In our small corner of a globalising world, there are perhaps few figures or institutions that can symbolise Egypt's advent into the new age of globalisation better than Tarek Nour and Americana. Indeed, the symbolism is so rich that it almost defies reality.

Americana is the name. The company was established in Egypt in 1979, the same year that witnessed the "historic" signing of the American-sponsored Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. It has two operations: one is packaged meat and poultry — which, until then we had known as a sign of poverty, as American food aid sold at subsidised prices in state-run and misnamed "consumer cooperatives"; the other, of course, is advertising.

Moreover, the company was established in Egypt by a Kuwaiti billionaire, who has had an Americana in the Gulf since '63. Volumes have been written, not least by Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, about the role of petrodollars in the Americanisation (now the globalisation) of Egypt. Other obvious references include the effects of the great migration wave towards the oil-rich Gulf states, which took off as Americana was being established in this country. There is also the Gulf War, and the US-led "Alliance for the Liberation of Kuwait". Volumes have been written about those, too.

But for most Egyptians, irrespective of the currently contested legalities of the matter, Americana is associated above all with Tarek Nour and his shadowy profile — his personal signature on the thousands of televised advertisements and billboards that, for nearly two decades, have provided the country with a *phantasmagoria* of images of its "globalised" self — blondes in *galabiyas*. Nour's "pretty young things" were unique, the vanguard of a veritable revolution in advertising in this country: they talked and sang in Arabic, did the odd "oriental" dance, but they simply did not look Egyptian.

For some time after the Nour revolution, I was convinced the ads were dubbed. Nour's blondes were true-blue central and north European blondes, not the fair-skinned Mediterranean brunettes whom Egyptians have always called *shaqrawat*, but who would have been described in a English novel as "dark". Even more amazing was that representatives of other "ethnic" groups in Nour's advertising also did not look Egyptian. When Americana's adds included the odd "person of colour", he or she looked African-American, or even "Chinese-American".

Enter "identity" politics and the cultural schizophrenia that is such a defining feature of our post-modern, globalising world. Even as Egyptian girls and young women were being brought up on a daily diet of Nour's blondes, they were donning the veil in ever greater numbers.

The most interesting aspect of the whole affair, however, is the battle of Americana itself: businessmen marshalling virtual private armies and, in their fierce battle over the Americana trademark, killing, maiming and creating havoc in the heart of Cairo. This battle is now taking place on a daily basis, though in less dramatic ways, and over "Americana" in a metaphorical rather than a direct sense.

During the last parliamentary elections, businessmen also fought fiercely: street battles, killings and bloodshed were a prominent feature of the poll, though, it seemed amazing then, the bulk of the fighting was not between political and ideological opponents, but between politicians-turned-entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs-turned-politicians, all of them espousing, when they do espouse anything beyond their pocketbooks, the same neo-liberal jargon. If they were not actually official candidates of the ruling NDP, they were proclaiming their undying allegiance to that party's "line".

At the time, it was clear that, just as liberalisation of the economy is synonymous with privatisation, so, it seems, is liberalisation in the realm of politics. It was Parliament itself, we discovered, that was due for privatisation.

The market may work in mysterious ways, but, to borrow from economist Galal Amin, in the neo-liberal as in other fundamentalisms, God's will is most often ultimately expressed by those who have the power to designate themselves its interpreters.

The battle of Americana uncovers the soul of the age of globalisation; it underlines the fact that behind the ephemeral plurality of choices, in our case vigorously marketed by blonde peasant women, human will is exercised within ever-narrower confines. Neo-liberalism is not an ideology of democracy but of oligarchy.

But the human yearning for emancipation and self-determination is as old as humanity itself. And in this sense, "Che Lives" in ways that *Newsweek* may vaguely and uneasily sense but is incapable of conceiving. Most people know Spartacus, as someone once wrote, but how many know the name of the Roman general who defeated him?

Generation games



Donia Gallery's summer offering, opening this week, is a group show hung under the collective title "A Meeting of Generations". The exhibition will contain pieces by several generations of artists, from early celebrities such as Hamed Nada and Seif and Adham Wanli, alongside works by contemporary practitioners, such as New York based Egyptian painter and illustrator Ahmed Morsi. Also included will be works by Sameh and Hosni El-Banani, Fatma Rifaat and Zakaria El-Zeini, allowing visitors a refreshing respite from the bulk of the private gallery summer shows which tend to concentrate exclusively on the galleries' own holdings of paintings remaining from the season's individual exhibitions. Donia Gallery, though, has opted to offer the visitor a mini-overview of some of the more prominent names to have emerged on the Egyptian art scene in the past decades, and though it is unlikely that major canvases will be exhibited, the juxtaposition of works by those artists who have effectively made it into the canon, and their juniors, is likely to be illuminating. For full details, see Listings. *(Illustration: Hamed Nada)*

Wolf at the door

David Blake joins in with the gangs for a nightly gathering at the brand new Babylon up on the hill





Who is up at the Citadel, above? Who else but Nevine Allouba

The Ninth Citadel Festival for Music and Song at the Salah El-Din Citadel: 15 August

Up here among the lights in the hanging gardens there is a strong odour of history. Exciting as a smell, but the musical sounds heard are a mess.

Everyone knows the cause, but the place has such charisma, is so much a con-place, holding out promises of great nights worthy of Verona, Taormina or Epidaurus, that we go on dreaming of audio changes. But they never come, and never will until the wind that streaks though the wide open spaces of the Citadel is tamed.

A few years ago this reviewer read in a reliable newspaper in London of an interesting festival being held at the very base of the Cairo landmark, the mosque of Mohamed Ali, the Citadel, which included all the orchestral work of the Swiss composer Frank Martin, one of the great composers of the 20th century. This proved true. Also given were Sherif Mohi El-Din's masterful settings for voice and orchestra of Amal Donqol's poem with Allouba as soloist. The concert proved unforgettable and, sadly, prophetic. That concert was listenable. *No trouble with the elements.*

Now, years later, they have expanded the whole conception of the festival, moved the venue, and this year it comes up in the grandiose package of the Ninth Citadel Festival for Music and Song at the Salah El-Din Citadel.

The Festival opened with well chosen banalities, offering high hopes and holidays. But there were rumours. On the night of the 15th, they presented Prokofiev's much loved *Peter and the Wolf*, orchestral fantasy with spoken narrative by Nevine Allouba, now supported by a sort of ghost Akhenaten Orchestra renamed, for the occasion, the Cairo Festival Orchestra.

Any talk of support, narrative, orchestra or maestro is pointless. It was a quick meal for the wind wolf. Plenty of gorging wolf, but no Peter and only a few shreds of Allouba, almost ripped from her nice elegant dress by the wolf. We were in for a rough passage.

Prokofiev. Forget him. Sherif Mohi El-Din survived but in ribbons. His orchestra bravely stood by him in rags. Peter wore on, but not even in his pants. It was a rip show. Peter rushed off, far away into the winds to cover himself with a towel. The rest of it had blown away — but not the wolf. He'll be back in our next installment.

The organisers had done their best. In fact everyone, even the vamped up venue, has done its best. The performers were talented, blameless, but doomed. The wind had won. Did no one ever remind them of the architectural facts? There are special place-savers to deal with the wind, but they were mostly ancient Greek, and it looks as though they possessed an acoustical secret of open air theatres which has been lost.

Yes, of course, it is free admission, and it should be. To pay to see good artists in slap up conditions is embarrassing. One gets the impression that cancellation of the rest of the concert had been considered because a lady in Arctic outfit braved and fought her way to centre stage, clutching a microphone, and really asked the audience if they wanted things to continue. Yes, came the *scream through the wind.*

So it went on. They prepared the piano with the top lifted. The programmes earlier had all blown away, so no titles and no names. A voice shouted to us that the accompanist was to be Salah El-Din Abdallah. He came. For piano enthusiasts let it be said not even the wind could break the piano's tone. Abdallah fought his way, and for the first time in the concert there were properly connected phrases of music. The wolf came on. He never went away, but changed his position and blew straight into the faces of the audience, bringing dust clouds.

And came Allouba. She is an adaptive, caring, high-toned performer and an actress of irony and power. She literally blew on stage. Shades of Laurel and Hardy. No wolf, though, would strip her. She stood at her battle station, and the show commenced. The pianist really let go with a "we are not interested in defeat" approach. And so Allouba and he lashed out their songs. Gershwin — Summertime of course. It went well and Allouba did a rock version of her own of the last verse. She did other things, including You Don't Bring Me Flowers Anymore, and the wolf grew worse. Allouba's voice took on a defiant, throbbing ring. Perhaps the Opera House will one day be gallant and allow her to sing Weill. Anyway, she grew better and larger as the songs continued.

The breakings of wind of the machinery grew more insufferable. But the two, voice and piano, would not give in. Allouba's invincible defiance of the elements was reminiscent of Caballé singing Norma in a rainstorm at the Orange Festival. Allouba has a fine middle voice and she played it up and down like a ball player. The piano grew louder, more didactic. They were passionately involved.

The concert had gone. The audience had gone — or most of it. Dust blew over the roofless base of the setting. The artists had won this battle of Waterloo. But at what a cost? These two, voice and piano, should receive some recognition for extreme bravery under fire.

What becomes of this brave, possibly impressive festival area *depends on technology. With it*, everything is possible — even audibility. The performers were ready, but not the machines.

Arabic Takht: Open Air Theatre: Cairo Opera House: 14 August

The successful practicalities of open air amplification were shown down at the Open Air Theatre of the Cairo Opera House. This summer Mohamed Mounir, Yehia Khalil, the Akhenaten Orchestra and then, on the 14th, this performance of Arabic *takht*, were all lit and amplified with tact. The group of young singers and their band did well. The audience was large and young, not infantine as up in the Citadel.

The mood is set in these concerts by a short overture by the band. Arabic, to a non-native, suggests Arabia, desert sands, white stallions thundering over the dunes, Lawrence of Arabia or a world in commotion. Not a chance. This noise is always the same: relaxed, rather late, civilised, indoor, a film soundtrack for a black and white Abdel-Wahab movie.

The various singers, all young, arrive on scene more as visitors to the party than as the established reasons for it. There is no lack of voices here. Many of those presented this night could well sing the lighter lyric roles in opera. But in Egypt opera is not a high target area for ambitious singers. And the money is dismal. Such voices go through a set formula, but with stylish results.

There were two women and three men whose songs showed some of the scope of this kind of music. The words are of prime importance. They are not interested in mood music. Something blue is not done, but words and sentences can suggest what is more important, and is more or less glazed over by the music.

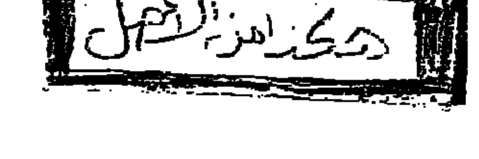
All the singers gave importance to the words of the songs. They acted with their voices. Two of the men, however, came closest to revamping the *takht* technique — floating melismatic phrases in the high registers of the sound. Omar El-Said, who came first, used this method and ended a lovely song with a trill any opera singer would have been proud to show.

Abeer Amin: the audience applauded her before she began, and gave her an ovation when she finished. She was confident and plangent.

Mohamed Fawzy was strong and tenor. During his section of songs a wind came up which threatened danger, but the machines managed to digest it, and the atmosphere settled peacefully. Amplification rather than suffocation.

Fatma El-Gahnany was powerful and metallic. The machines behaved, and her section of the *takht* was the longest and best. Her voice is high and clear, low and urgent. She began to throb with emotion like an angry cello. She was straight from shoulder, copious and humorous. The audience loved her. A huge hand.

The last singer, Mohsen Farouk, was a breath from the North. A voice softly floating, easy, which allowed him to weave a spell. He wove it so effectively that when he finished the audience just sat there, then began to move out into the mauve and steamy night.



Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Gamal Gad Mleika
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.
Recent paintings and sculpture by an Egyptian artist now resident in Italy.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat. 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Group Show
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12pm-10pm. 24 Aug-30 Sep.
Works by Hamed Nada, Sameh and Hosny El-Banani, Seif and Adham Wali, Fatma Rifaat and Zakaria El-Zeini among others.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassaan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawi, Hisham El-Zeiny, Hussein Sharif, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri. 10.30am-2pm. & 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by Tahiya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Morsi, Salem Salah, George Bahgory, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until the end of Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgory, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St. Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artifacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city. Elegant, airy, and with pleasant garden cafe.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Gundi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Russian Films
Pushkin Centre for Russian Culture, 127 El-Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 360 6371.
Russian and Egyptian film screenings every Monday at 7pm.

Indian Films
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162.
21 August, 4.30pm: **Main Azad Hun**
25 August, 4.30pm: **Shamsha**
The Indian Cultural centre continues its summer season of Amitab Bachchan's films.

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. Until August. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/ 392 5162/ 3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
***Odeon I**, Abdel Hamid Said st., Downtown. Tel 575 8797. **MGM**, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 252 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Metro**, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **El-Salam**, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **El-Haram**, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Karim I**, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Normandy**, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Radio**, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Tahrir**, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & Thur-Sat, midnight. **Rivoli I**, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.*
Youssef Chahine's latest mega-production, starring Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida, Safeiya El-Emari and a large, young, cast-hetically pleasing cast.



Museum of Modern Egyptian Art

Anaconda
***Ramsis Hilton**, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. **Cosmos II**, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*
This time it's a monster snake.

Double Team
***Cairo Sheraton**, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. **Karim II**, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*
With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke.

Liar Liar
***Ramsis Hilton**, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.*
For one day attorney Jim Carrey can only tell the truth.

'Awdat El-Ebn El-Dall (Return of the Prodigal Son)
***Odeon II**, Abdel Hamid Said st., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*
Directed by Youssef Chahine, the film stars Hesham Selim, Mahmoud El-Meligui and Magda El-Roumi.

Eskenderiya... Leih (Alexandria... Why)
***Odeon III**, Abdel Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*
The third of Cinema Odeon's mini film festival in honour of Youssef Chahine.

Hazzemni Ya...
***Cinema Cairo**, Saray El-Ezbekiya, downtown. Tel 574 5350. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Tiba I**, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*
Fifi Abduh's belly-dancing stage hit transferred to the screen.

Toffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
***Diana Palace**, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*
With Leila Elwi and Maged El-Maari.

The Woman and the Cleaver
***Sphinx**, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 3pm. **Miami**, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Roxy**, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Tiba I**, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Lido**, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Cosmos I**, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Rivoli II**, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.*
Nabila Ebeid's latest venture involves the hacking to pieces of men.

MUSIC

Arabic Music Ensemble
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 21 August, 9pm.

Salah Ragab Jazz Ensemble
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 24 August, 9pm.

Ismailia Festival Troupes
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 22-23 & 25-27 August, 9pm.

THEATRE

Qatl Shafiqua (The Murder of Shafiqua)
El-Harrawi House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 3404234. Until 21 August. 9pm.
Scripted by Metwalli Hamed and directed by Hussein Sharafeddin, the play is based on an Egyptian folktale about young Shafiqua and her brother Metwalli who kills her when she becomes a prostitute. Other versions include the cinema production starring Soad Hosny and Ahmed Zaki.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm, Mon 5pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi and starring all the family members of the televised series.

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm exc Fri, 8.30pm.
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 10 pm.
With Hala Sedqi, Farouq El-Fishawi and Ezzat El-Alayli; directed by Essam El-Sayed

'Alam Guineadi (The World of Guineadi)
Small Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9pm.
Musical directed Fawzi El-Melighi, score by Tarek Abbas.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

El-Mahzala (The Farce)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.
Youssef Idris play revived with Sherine, Omar El-Hariri and Tarek El-Dessouqi; directed by Shaker Abdel-Latif.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Gundi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi and a contingent of Russian ballet dancers; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yoghurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm, exc Mon & Fri, 8pm
Sayed Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and legendary dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Ta'm El-Kalam (The Taste of Words)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10 pm
Abdullah Mahmoud, Farouk Naguib and Manal Salama, directed by Hossam El-Din Saleh.

Malek Walla Kitabah (Heads or Tails)
Small Hall, El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 8pm
Mustafa Saad directs Medhat Morsi and Salwa Osman in his own play.

Leila Foul (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. For times check with venue.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and singer Ahmed Ibrahim in a light musical.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Nadia Omar Amin

PAINTINGS by **Abdel-Wahab Morsi**, inspired by pharaonic and folkloric motifs, are on show at **Khan El-Maghraby** as part of the Summer Collection group show. Accomplished technique, compositional balance, and elegant restraint characterise the show.

The **Atelier du Caire** exhibits paintings by **Nadia Omar Amin** and **Abada Zoheiry**. The work of the former, occupying two rooms, has Nilotic, specifically Nubian culture and environment, as its subject, while that of the latter is abstract and concerns itself with mood — contemplative and turbulent by turns.

The **Round Gallery of the Plastic Artists Syndicate** shows computer graphics by **Mohamed Ali Abdu**.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***

Youssef Chahine's latest film is now on general release. Below, *Destiny* the film is reviewed, while the director speaks of his own

Constant preoccupations

Khariya El-Bishlawi examines the continuities and ruptures in Youssef Chahine's latest film



Nour El-Sherif as Averroes

According to Youssef Chahine there is little if any difference between the church and the mosque when it comes to fanaticism. Equally, there is little if any difference between a gypsy singer and an Arab philosopher when it comes to enriching the soul and celebrating life. In the same vein, the son and heir of the Caliph and a dispossessed gypsy girl can be united in love. Christians, Muslims and Jews can love each other, they can even sleep together, as long as they do do without malice. Despite real obstacles, the barricades of real life, the facts of history, everything is possible in Chahine's *Destiny*, but on one condition — that we all participate in confronting fanaticism, which seeks to obstruct understanding, and seeks to swallow love.

In the opening sequence of the film, as books are burning on the pyre, we glimpse the word "love" inscribed on one of the pages, just before it is consumed by the flames. The message that Chahine wants to fly on the wings of his "destiny" is encapsulated in this scene.

The first impression created by the film's opening is of an unexpectedly simplistic message: the phenomenon of religious terrorism which Chahine implants in twelfth century Adalusia has everything to do with today's terrorism as practised by Islamist extremists in Egypt and Algeria and other places in the world and very little to do with the time and place in which his film is set. This is perhaps understandable since Chahine himself has borne the brunt of fundamentalist attacks, seeing his own production, *Al-Muhagir* (The Emigrant), effectively banned.

In *Destiny*, though, Chahine appears keen on condemning the phenomenon of fanaticism the world over. The film opens in a France that is at the mercy of the Inquisition, contrasting this with Andalusia, a haven of enlightenment and culture. Religious terrorism is an old and continuous phenomenon, Chahine reminds us, experienced by Christians in the West during the Middle Ages as well as by Muslims centuries ago. Indeed, the film goes on to argue, it was terrorism that led to the decline of Arab civilisation in Spain and its eventual downfall. Just as Gerard, a Frenchman, is burnt at the stake because of translating the work of Averroes, the "heretic", at the beginning of the film, so to the works of Averroes himself meet a similar destiny at the hands of Muslim extremists. Yet despite the gathering forces of darkness, the cult of the irrational, as long as "songs are still possible, palm trees still rise to the sky, there shall never be fear...or defeat."

The film, then, begins with a pyre but ends with a song, though the singer has himself been assassinated. Ideas have wings to carry them from one country to another. Life yields its luscious fruits not for the dour and conspiratorial but for those who dream and sing. And in the midst of all this, the artist intellectual occupies centre stage, though the game of chess between the intellectual and the dictator is always bound, ultimately, to end in victory for the former since the latter's vanity will eventually render him insensitive to danger.

Mahmoud Hemeida, in the role of the dictator who conceives of himself as the impersonation of the country ("I am Andalusia"), put in a solid, powerful performance. Nur El-Sherif managed to convey Chahine's vision of the enlightened and rational intellectual as a powerful counterweight to the ruler. As for singer Mohamed Mounir, as the gypsy singer intended to embody meanings no less sublime than those embodied in the philosopher, he was in his element.

But let us agree before going any further that all this is fantasy. What we see on the screen is not a historical film, though it is cast in the form of one. Yet Chahine certainly had no intention of making a biopic of Averroes, Cordoba's supreme judge and one of the most influential philosophers of his time. History, in Chahine's *Destiny*, and in the main character played by Nur El-Sherif, is just a peg for on which Chahine hangs questions related to terrorism today and the power struggles between the clergy and the rulers on the one hand, and intellectuals and artists on the other.

The script that attempted to articulate that struggle was unfortunately one of the weakest elements in the film. Many characters are reduced to simple vehicles for Chahine's ideas, including the character of Averroes, which maintains dramatic integrity only because of El-Sherif's acting and despite the banal colloquial dialogue and philosophical aphorisms spouted.

The ideas contained in *Destiny* are a continuation of those already expressed in earlier Chahine films, especially *Alexandria... Why?*, *Adieu Bonaparte*, *The Sixth Day* and even *The Emigrant*. At the heart of all these films is the question of our relationship vis-à-vis the west, and the inevitability of interacting with that west, whether it arrives on our doorsteps as conquerer, or whether we approach it of our own will, whether we view it as a source of learning or whether we are reminding westerners of their own debts to Arab scientists and philosophers. In *Destiny*, the character of Youssef, son of the French Gerard, becomes a function of this relationship.

In Chahine's formula there is always an emotional and human component to the relationship with the "other", whether western or simply different, which will often result in new life — Sarah and Ibrahim in *Alexandria ... Why?*, Ram and Hatti in *The Emigrant* and Sarah the gypsy girl and Abdallah the son of the Caliph in *Destiny*.

There is, too, invariably an attempt to articulate a "rational" position, one suspicious of the clergy, that is common to such different Chahine films as *The Land* and *Adieu Bonaparte*. And finally, there is also Chahine's recurrent fascination with the idea of a despotic ruler, infatuated by his own power but oblivious to his duties as a father.

So much for the common features of the films Chahine has made in the last 15 or so years. With the present film , though, it is hard to avoid comparison with a number of films made in the west, particularly Francois Truffaud's *Fahrenheit 451* . *Destiny* differs, though, from *Fahrenheit 451* in that Chahine chooses to clothe his message in jolly episodes to the extent that many of the musical scenes resemble video clips. It would seem that Chahine, chastened by his earlier experiences with The Emigrant, has attempted to pre-empt any criticism and pacify the potentially hostile response that had already been generated by the earlier film. Certainly the pre-release publicity campaign was skilfully managed, setting the stage, post Cannes award, for the general release of a film that had already been widely hailed as a masterpiece.

The importance of Chahine's most recent film, however, lies in the fact that it shows, as practically as possible, that it remains possible to make good films in Egypt. The excellent music of Kamal El-Tawil and Yehia El-Mougi, the brilliant cinematography of Mohsen Nasr and the singing of Mohamed Mounir were all elements that contributed to enhancing the artistic qualities of *Destiny*, allowing it to compete with any international film. But the question remains — why do we not produce more films of the same calibre in Egypt? Is it simply a question of the lack of funds, or is it because there are few directors as accomplished or skilful as Chahine.

There are no secrets now

Youssef Chahine talks to **Nigel Ryan** and **Nur Elmessiri** about his first festival, latest film and the future



"Forty-five years ago I was attending my first festival. I had carried the boxes of film myself. I arrived in Venice and I said here I am. And they said who the hell are you? I said I've got a film and I want you to show it. And they said the programme was full. But they gave me a 10 o'clock morning showing, *when everyone in Venice is in their bikinis* on the beach sunning themselves. Still I went to the theatre and thought how many people could it fit. It could take about 2,000.

"So I was outside, and I counted people entering and four people went in. Four out of 2,000. I thought, well it's not too bad, and I knew three Egyptians to add to the four. But I must say I was a little bit sad and I looked up at the sky and thought this is very unfair. I'd come a long way and I was very tired. Then a huge storm came up, rain and and and and...people ran off the beach and filled the theatre. And I was really happy.

"In the evening we were celebrating and there was an Egyptian singer, Mohamed Fawzi. I remember the evening well. He came round and asked what do you want. I told him to do *el-ahat*, he said what *ahat*; I said do *ahah, ya lail ya ain*... do anything, let's see how it works with the orchestra. And he started doing the Egyptian *ahat* and the orchestra caught the beat, and the two together, it was like...Flamenco.

"It was most artificial and yet it was *like magic*, the whole thing. Ever since that moment I have felt like doing something with Flamenco. Flamenco comes from Andalusia, and what was Andalusia? It was Arab. And that is how Flamenco music entered into the soul. The Occidental and ours.

"Lately, when they ask me where I find stories I reply that you have to find them in your everyday life. Two years back, they stopped my pictures being shown. Sometimes they don't realise how expensive a movie is. So it was not just a question of ruining me financially, but also of writing me off as somebody with something to say, somebody who could participate in the movement of my country. And it was not pleasant, you know, going from one court house to the other and being convicted on a quite high level, or at least a highly annoying level. And so I began to look at the mechanisms of what they call justice. Who can do what to whom?.

"And I thought who the hell is he, this man bringing the case against my film? He has nothing to do with motion pictures, he's not a writer, *he's not* a thinker, he's nothing. He's a lawyer. His job is how to find trouble and holes in the other fellow's case. How can they waste your time by dragging you from one court house to another? It was unpleasant but at the same time pleasant when you realise how many people showed solidarity. A lot of people became involved in the case and some people really astonished me. They were just artists and musicians; they hadn't worked with me and yet there was this very warm feeling.

"At the same time, I thought of another case, involving one of my favorite actors, a very brilliant actor who did *Alexandria, Why?* with me and *Adieu Bonaparte* and *The Sixth Day*. In *Alexandria, Why?*, he had played me to the extent that he looked more me than me and together we received a prize from the Grand Jury at the Berlin Film Festival. We were very close, and when we began shooting *The Sixth Day* that wonderful complicity we enjoyed was working. With one look at me he understood why I had stopped, why I said cut, because he read my eyes immediately. He was more than a son. He played my part and became almost me, or at least the actor that I had wanted to be.

"So we came to the third picture together, the fourth, and after about five weeks — we started off not on the right foot probably — he had some reticence with the part. It was very strange because it was a wonderful part and we loved it very much. He had read the script and for five weeks we worked together fine. Then over about three days his eyes became glazed and there was absolutely no contact. I would say good morning on set and he'd answer in a very, very strange way. Suddenly he was another person.

"At the time I did think of brainwashing, but to what extent can brainwashing do that kind of thing? And it turned out that it was brainwashing to an unbelievable extent, and at an unbelievable speed. Four or five weeks, his wife was also included in that... Suddenly he looked as if he belonged to another world.

"And it was then I started thinking about sects — had he become involved with a sect? There was a total split after that, he split with everybody, his friends, even his parents. I suffered a lot. And one day he mentioned the word, that the only way that this could work out — what this was I didn't understand very well — was for him to make a total break. And I thought if that was his will, it's his will. But what had happened to his will?

"So the origins of *Destiny* involve all these things. You have Flamenco, and you have your work being stopped by some extremists... Here I choose my words more precisely than the Occident. The Occident has a definite intention of *dirtying Islam or at least counting it out of* anything that is cultural. The only culture that exists is American culture, the only cinema American cinema... And when you tie terrorism with Islam it makes me angry. And yet they keep on saying it on television, on CNN, on France Deux, that there is something called Islamic terrorism. They don't talk about Jewish terrorists and when things happen in Oklahoma, they don't say it's a Catholic terrorist... And all this was making me slightly more than angry. Neither the Arabs know their history well enough, nor the Occident, which has benefitted from Arab thought a great deal. The Age of Enlightenment was triggered by Averroes. He was translated and discussed and applied and the Occident profited even more than we did. We are still discussing, after eight centuries of discussion. So though this film is not exactly about Averroes, he becomes an important character.

"People always ask what your next film will be. Your next film, though, is never an accident. It must *be needed*. It must address what is happening.

"Two years ago we were living in terror. And so I thought it was time to talk about these people. You cannot simply write them off as sects that have no reason behind them. You have to ask why. Once you disdain the other fellow there is no security. The only way to get security is to be loved by the other fellow. So when they told me during the case against *El-Muhagir* that I had been threatened and needed security guards, I could stand it for three days only before it was stifling and I told them to go to hell. I went down to the most difficult, or what people say are dangerous, quarters, and the feeling that I got was that people's love is the only thing that can protect me. Nothing else. So OK, a madman can come along and stick you with a knife, but that's a madman. And that possibility is there, just like the possibility of being run over by a donkey.

"There are many extremists — money extremists, religious extremists, political extremists — the people *who tell you that only they can read the revelation*, not you. So OK, these are the mad people. But then you have some very learned people at the university and they said: so you're going to talk about Averroes? And I replied, well, anything that you have read I can read. And then somebody said, well I am the specialist, and I replied, well, that's your problem. OK, be a specialist, but that will not stop me from reading, maybe as much as you, because the responsibility of doing a film is bigger than teaching. And anyway, I said, *I'll be seeing Averroes*, and understanding him according to my sensibility. If you like it that's good, and if you don't, then do your own picture or write your own book, but don't stop me from talking.

"But this is always the extremists' way, to decide that they alone know how to read a revelation, or know the character — these are the culture crazies — or decide about the economy — these are the economic experts. And the strange thing is these people know that they are perfectly right yet when I look around me I see a shitty world.

"OK. I know I'm going from one subject to another, but this is inevitable. Everything is linked, and when you are writing a script you must know what is happening in the world. You must know how things will *influence you*. You must ask how things are influencing me socially, psychologically, even how they influence me sexually. So I must work out all the elements in this equation.

"I have to find all the possible ways to talk about what is going on now. Ways of saying it and not being censored, because there is still a very severe censorship. Come on, let's not fool ourselves. OK we are going towards democracy, but it's still a long way off. And this makes it a necessity for people to talk.

Of course, I am able to get away with saying things every now and again. But it has happened to me, I have had films banned. What then do I do?

"A film can be extremely vulnerable you know. You only have one negative... I don't even repeat a shot unless it is extremely necessary. I only repeat if my actors are not good enough. But usually the technique is prepared way in advance.

"Months before beginning *Destiny* I had taken all the necessary photos and seen the difference between *the real Andalusia and where I could shoot — the Andalusia* that was in my imagination. Nothing in Granada, nothing in Cordova, all I could see was tourists... I found the counterpart to my imaginative Andalusia in Syria and Lebanon. And in the end it is an imaginative thing I'm doing, not trying to militate particularly for somebody else. I'm doing my feelings, it's my point of view.

"But I don't like people trying to ban my pictures. And of course the authorities, they don't know what to do with me, they don't know what to do without me. I've been around for many, many years. And look what happened when we received the 50th anniversary prize in Cannes. When I returned people I had never seen had tears in their eyes and they were tears of joy, which must mean that people needed to find some real, unadulterated joy. Egyptian culture was being appreciated internationally, and Egyptian culture means Arab culture.

"Yet despite this appreciation a law was announced this week giving a concessions and tax breaks to those who will invest at least LE200 million in films. I started my whole company with LE45,000 pounds and it is doing the difficult pictures. It gives chances to very young people, young directors, at least three a year. Do the authorities really believe that big corporations with LE 200 million to invest will do the same? Absolutely no. Will they find it a moral necessity to give chances to new people? I doubt it. Yet they will get the breaks and financial help.

"We all suffer very much trying to provide quality in a context which is disastrous. And all we have asked is to be taxed a little bit less, that the cinema be offered a little bit of help. Giving concessions to those with LE 200 million is hardly the answer. It is said that the new law will bring big money into the industry. But who has the big money? Businessmen. But businessmen are not interested, because cinema is very difficult. A businessman wants to do a carpet , and then the carpet sells, and then he wants 10 carpets, and he pushes a button and they give him 10 carpets exactly the same. He wants a million and he pushes another button. But a motion picture is always a prototype. Just because a film suceeds, I will not do another, a *Rambo II*. Every new picture is a new creation, so you can't push a goddam button. Big businessmen will not be interested in investing in cinema. So who are the people who will invest the money? Foreign countries, who would like to dominate the Egyptian cinema. And this is utterly unacceptable. We will not accept it. So what will we do? I told them I'd chain myself to the railings of the doors of the prime minister's office and I'll go on hunger strike. We did it before, we can do it again.

"Let us not be too shy about fighting back. Culture is the education of the masses, at least this is culture for me. And the Palestinians proved that the stone is much much more powerful than the atomic bomb. A mere stone. So yes, you can fight back, even when the odds look impossible.

"My next film? I have a lot of research to do, but it will probably be about globalisation. It started hitting my consciousness in 1973. Many, many questions need to be asked about the Gulf War, when we first heard about globalisation and the new world order. The ground work for American hegemony — they had help from 50 separate nations including Egypt when there were a lot of Egyptians in the Iraqi army — must be explored. It is something I touched on in my Cairo film, which is probably why it was banned. But how can you fight the new world order? It's not so easy. Yet even if those in power want us to be marginal I will not be marginal. One billion people watched the Cannes festival prize giving. There are very few secrets now. So we're going to fight back."

Plain Talk

I must admit that when it comes to art, I am a conservative. I do not go for modern schools of art — surrealism, cubism et al. Maybe it is due to my age, or to my upbringing, but I get little out of a Picasso or a Matisse. And I was happy to discover that I am not alone in this. The other day I came across an interesting article entitled "What the whole world likes best", which is based on an international survey about current tastes in art.

The survey shows that while Picasso and Van Gogh have their admirers, the general public would rather hang on their walls "blue landscapes, preferably with a mountain, lake and a few wild animals, and perhaps the odd historical figure wandering around."

The fifteen nations polled include China, France, Russia, Kenya, Iceland and Turkey. In every country, the article claims, people have voted overwhelmingly for a predominance of blue, and a pastoral scene with a stretch of water. The universal dislike "has been modern abstract paintings with a predominance of red."

The survey was carried out by two market researchers, applying market research principles to art. The research has so far taken them two years, during which they covered more than one third of the planet. They will continue with their research, hoping to be able to cover the rest of the globe. Apart from likes and dislikes, the survey has yielded a number of startling conclusions. For instance, "there is no such thing as national culture. There is no big difference between Kenya and Iceland, China and France."

There is no doubt that some will be shocked by the idea of selling art in the same way as tooth paste. The hundred or so questions put to the interviewees are the same as those used for commercial market research. The results of the American poll — the US being the researchers' first poll of call — were "a complete shock. We had *expected that there* would be different choices broken down into different classes, ethnic groups and ages. Instead whites, blacks, Hispanics, Jews, rich and poor, all wanted the same thing." The researchers had intended to organise an exhibition to show the selected paintings, liked and disliked. In the end, though, "we were in a panic because we had organised a huge space for the exhibition and ended up with only two paintings, the favourite and the least favourite."

Although the researchers thought that American results were an anomaly, they *kept getting the same results* over and over again. Without exception "people wanted blue landscapes with water and mountains." The Danes, says the report, wanted a ballet dancer by the lake and a national flag, the Portuguese wanted their lake to have a small village on a far bank, the Kenyans wanted a hippo as well as two deer grazing by the lake."

Many in the art world refuse to buy the results. They refuse the conclusion that countries should not try to define themselves by culture, that culturally we're much more similar than we want to admit. The survey shows that people believe that Picasso and his contemporaries are all very well in a gallery, but, as one interviewer puts it, "I am not sure I would like to live with them. This", he adds, pointing at a landscape, "I could look at every day without being disturbed."

The researchers conclude that "the results of our poll show what we have suspected, that artists paint for themselves rather than what people really want. We don't care what the art community thinks — art belongs to the people. They're our audience, after all. What we're seeing is that people really want art, but... the artists don't serve them."

While the survey is obviously quite simplistic, it shows clearly that artists do not think of their audiences. At the same time there is no doubt that people are not ready to dispense with art, which they continue to equate with beauty — hence the phrase "the fine arts". The next country to be polled by the researchers is Britain. Judging by the success of *The Sunday Times* competition for landscape paintings, I am sure the results will be the same.

Mursi Saad El-Din

The river released

Until the construction of the first Aswan Dam in 1902, the summer months would have witnessed the overflowing of the Nile and the cutting of the dam which let the waters into the heart of Cairo. When the Nile failed to rise to the desired level, catastrophe struck and the country was threatened by drought. But when the river fulfilled its promise, the city celebrated for days. **Fayza Hassan** joins the festivities

One of the main objectives of the conquest of Egypt by Amr Ibn Al-Aas was to ensure that the Hejaz would be adequately and easily supplied with grain. Having established Fustat, he turned his attention to this task. According to several accounts, Amr wrote to Umar Ibn Al-Khattab: "I will send to Medina a train of camels so long that the first camel will have reached you before the last has left me." But then Amr had another idea. He wrote to the Caliph: "If you want the price of the grain to be the same [in Medina] as it is in Egypt, I will dig a canal."

Convinced that the price of the grain would decrease if transport was effected by water from Cairo to the Red Sea, the Caliph Umar is said to have authorised the digging of a canal. Whether or not the exchange actually took place in this precise manner is a matter of conjecture, but Amr did order for an ancient canal, which had been functional centuries before, to be cleared. This canal had been dug by Neccao (r 610-595BC) along a depression left by the Nile when it changed its course, moving westward, to link the Nile with the Red Sea. Periodically filled up with silt, the canal had functioned imperfectly and had fallen into disuse several times. "The canal was a remarkable piece of work, but difficult to maintain," writes André Raymond (*Le Caire*, Fayard, 1993). "It was the object of several restorations over the centuries, by Darius in 518BC then by the Roman Emperor Trojan and finally by Amr."

The original opening of the canal was situated on the level of Babylon, but Amr decided to move its point of junction with the Nile to the north, approximately where the quarter of Sayeda Zeinab was later established. This new version of the old works did not meet with a better fate than its predecessors. During the following century it was completely blocked by order of the Abbassid Caliph Al-Mansour, its waters accumulating to the north-east of Cairo in a depression which became known as Birket El-Hajj because it was the first station at which the pilgrims gathered on their way to Mecca.





Father Nile: housed in the Vatican, this statue portrays the river as a life force *(photo courtesy of Maged Farag)*

Ceremonies and superstitions

For thousands of years, the rhythm of economic activity in Egypt was controlled by the flooding of the Nile. Until the construction of the first dam in Aswan in 1902, the flood waters used to reach the foot of the Pyramids and the Sphinx.

From 15 June on, the level of the floods was measured daily at the Nilometre, erected at the southern point of Roda Island. When the level rose to 16 cubits (*dhira'*), which meant a normal flood for that particular year, Egyptians stopped worrying and the traditional ceremonies which accompanied the cutting of the dam, carried over from Pharaonic times, took place. When the Nile did not attain the necessary level at this particular time, the whole country went into mourning before actually suffering the consequences of an insufficient flood.

EW Lane, in *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (East-West Publications, 1989) gives a complete eyewitness account of the numerous rituals he was able to observe in 1834, around the time of the floods: "The night of the 17th of June, which corresponds with the 11th of the Coptic month of Babooneh, is called 'Leylet en-Nuktah' (or the Night of the Drop) as it is believed that a miraculous drop then falls into the Nile and causes it to rise. Astrologers calculate the precise moment when the 'drop' is to fall, which is always in the course of the night above mentioned. Many of the inhabitants of Cairo and its neighbourhood, and of other parts of Egypt, spend this night on the banks of the Nile, some in houses of their friends, others in the open air. Many also, and especially women, observe a singular custom on the Leylet en-Nuktah — placing upon a terrace of the house after sunset as many lumps of dough as there are inmates in the house, a lump for each person, who puts his or her mark upon it." The next day at daybreak the lumps of dough revealed information about their respective owners: If someone's lump was cracked, it meant that his/her life would end in the course of the year; if it was not, the reverse should be inferred. For other observers, an uncracked lump meant that the Nile would rise high in the ensuing season.

Reading the waters

It is very likely that the Nilometre has existed since ancient times, though it may not have been erected first on Roda Island. The first well documented Nilometre was built after the Arab conquest on the southern tip of Roda by the governor Osama Ibn Al-Walid (r 705-715). This Nilometre was destroyed by the floods and was replaced by the one which currently stands on Roda, built by Mohamed Al-Hasib for the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil in 861. Some reconstruction work was then effected at Ibn Tulun's behest in the ninth century. The reading of the height of the waters was the traditional right of the El-Raddad family, who had guarded the Nilometre since pre-Islamic times. The critical height was 16 cubits, and once this was reached the signal was given for the ceremony of the cutting of the dam to be staged at Fumm El-Khalig, on the east bank of the Nile.

On the day that the reading showed that the Nile had reached a height of 16 cubits, the minimum level required for proper irrigation and a successful agricultural year, the *munadi* (crier) went about his district proclaiming *Wafa' El-Nil* (the fulfilment of the Nile's vow). "In this," writes Lane, "the people are always deceived, for there is an old law, that land-tax cannot be exacted unless the Nile rises to 16 cubits of the Nilometre: and the government thinks it proper to make the people believe as early as possible that it has attained this height."

The first of the floods

A description of the first day of the floods is to be found in *Al-Waqu'i Al-Misriya* (the Official Gazette, Egypt's first newspaper) No 45, dated Monday 17 Safar, 1245. This serious publication described the events preceding the rise of the Nile waters as follows: "The Nile is a river whose waters are from heaven. Since the time of Adam, we know neither the source of nor the reason for its floods, though the most distinguished geographers claim that its waters fall from the mountains of the moon to gather in two round lakes, then branch out from Abyssinia and the Sudan in golden streams which cross Egypt on their way to the Mediterranean.

"From the time of its rise — called *Suqout El-Nuqta* — which occurs on 10 Huzairan (July), it rises solely until Leylet El-Salib (14 Aylul), then keeps on rising until 1 Teshrin (Dec-Jan) from 20 cubits to 22 on the Nilometre. The measure of the rise is ascertained by readings of the Nilometre. Government employees calculate the rise, which is then announced to the people so that they can rejoice. When the waters reach 24 cubits on the Nilometre, the dam of El-Khalig El-Masri is cut.

"For this event, Ancient Egyptian customs are still in use: When the ruler hears of the news, he sends out his criers. On this day, the inhabitants of Misr come out in the streets to celebrate. In the evening they hire small boats from Bulaq and Old Cairo and sail on the Khalig and around Roda Island. There are so many people that one is reminded of descriptions of doomsday; actually the crowds are so thick that, should it rain, not a drop of water would fall to the ground. Mohamed Ali's employees are given a holiday, the High Diwan included. They all come to attend the cutting of the dam. As soon as the waters start flowing, the sound of the cannons can be heard. At this point, the dignitaries and the military accompanying Katkhoda Bek sail on El-Aqba, which is illuminated like Sulayman's ring. Tents are erected on the shores of the Khalig and the dignitaries distribute money and clothes..."

Lane has a more detailed description of the events: "...numerous boats, hired by private parties for pleasure, repair to the neighbourhood of the entrance of the Canal. Among these is a very large boat called the 'Akabeh'. It is painted for the occasion in a gaudy but rude manner, and has two or more small cannons on board, and numerous lamps attached to the ropes, forming various devices such as a large star, etc... It has also over the cabin a large kind of close awning, composed of pieces of silk and other stuffs, and is adorned with two pennants. It is vulgarly believed that this boat represents a magnificent vessel in which the Egyptians used, before the conquest of their country by the Arabs, to convey the virgin whom it is said they threw in the Nile."

The Nile rises...

"The Nile..." writes Lane, "begins to rise about, or soon after, the period of the summer solstice. From or about the 27th of the Coptic month Ba-ooneh (3rd of July), its rise is daily proclaimed in the streets of the metropolis. There are several criers to perform this office — each for a particular district of the town. The Crier of the Nile (Munadee en-Neel)" is accompanied by a young boy, and he and the boy repeat the proclamation "until the day next before that on which the dam that closes the mouth of the Canal of Cairo is cut."

Lane, often an acute observer, continues his account thus: "During this day preparations are made for cutting the dam of the canal... The dam is constructed before or soon after the commencement of the Nile increase. The 'Khaleeg' or Canal, at the distance of about four hundred feet within its entrance, is crossed by an old stone bridge of one arch. About sixty feet in front of this bridge is the dam, which is of earth, very broad at the bottom, and diminishing in breadth towards the top, which is flat, and about three yards broad. The top of the dam rises to the height of about twenty-two or twenty-three feet above the level of the Nile when at the lowest, but not so high above the bed of the canal; for this is several feet above the low-water mark of the river, and consequently dry for some months when the river is low. The banks of the canal are a few feet higher than the top of the dam."

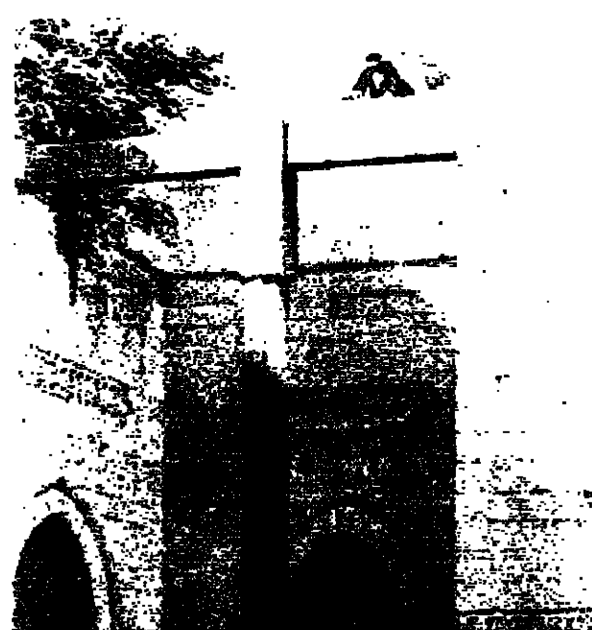
The Bride of the Nile

Between the dam and the bridge, *Arousset El-Nil* (the Bride of the Nile) was then constructed, "a round pillar of earth, diminishing towards the top, in the form of a truncated cone..."upon its flat top and upon that of the dam a little maize or millet is generally sown."

The "Bride" was washed down by the rising tide before the river attained its peak, "generally more than a week or fortnight before the dam is cut."

Quoting from El-Maqrizi, Lane dates the origins of this custom to the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs: Amr Ibn Al-Aas "was told that the Egyptians were accustomed at the period when the Nile began to rise to deck a virgin in gay apparel, and throw her into the river as a sacrifice, to obtain a plentiful inundation." Amr abolished the barbarous custom at once and in consequence, it is said, the Nile did not rise at all for three months after the beginning of the period when it usually rose.

The people were terrified, expecting a famine to follow. Amr wrote to the Caliph Omar to inform him of what he had done and of the consequences which now threatened Egypt. Omar's reply to Amr was one of approval at his humane gesture. He also enclosed a note which he ordered Amr to throw in the Nile. "The purport of the note was as follows," according to Lane: "From Abdallah Omar, Prince of the Faithful, to the Nile of Egypt: 'If thou flow of thine own accord, flow not; but if it be God, the One, the Mighty,







The Nilometer at Aswan, from David Robert's *Egypt and Nubia* (in Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*, London, 1983); The Ezbekiya square when flooded, from *Description de l'Egypte* (ibid.); The Festival of Gabr El-Kalig, or Breaking the Canal, *Illustrated London News*, 1 November 1862 (*An Egyptian Panorama*, Nicholas Warner, ed., Cairo, 1994)

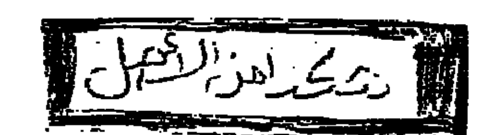






illustration: Gamil Shafiq

who causeth thee to flow, we implore God, the One, the Mighty, to make thee flow'." Amr did as he was commanded and the Nile rose sixteen cubits the following night.

On the north side of the Canal overlooking the dam, a small stone building had been constructed from which the state dignitaries used to supervise the operation of the cutting of the dam. When Lane wrote his description the building was in ruin and tents were erected for the dignitaries and their visitors.

In other tents were stored the supplies of "fireworks, chiefly rockets, [offered by the government] to honour the festival, and to amuse the populace during the night preceding the day when the dam is cut, and during the operation itself, which is performed early in the morning." Other small tents were reserved for the sale of sweetmeats, fruit, and coffee ready for the *Youm Gabr El-Bahr*, the day on which the Nile rose to its maximum level.

A feast for the flood

The boats would begin to take on passengers from Bulaq in the early afternoon and would head for Roda Island. Most boats remained close to the Aqaba, which was moored on the banks of the island; "but some, all the evening and night, are constantly sailing up or rowing down the river. In many boats the crews amuse themselves and their passengers by singing, often accompanied by the darabukkeh and the zummarah; and some private parties hire professional musicians to add to their diversion on the river."

During the night, the river and its banks presented a striking scene: "Numerous boats are constantly passing up and down and the lamps upon the rigging of the Akabeh and in other boats, as well as on the shore, where there are also many mesh'al [torchlights] stuck in the ground... have a striking effect, which is occasionally rendered more lively by the firing of the guns and the ascent of a number of rockets. The most crowded part of the scene of the festival at night is the bank of the island, where almost every person is too happy to sleep, even if the noise of the guns, etc... did not prevent him."

In former years, recounts Lane, there were always dancing-girls to grace the festivities as well as singers, musicians and reciters of romances. Mohamed Ali, however, banned the dancing-girls from Cairo and there was little left that "a stranger would think could minister to their [the crowds'] amusement". But, comments Lane, "they seem to require nothing more to enliven them than crowds and bustle, with a pipe and a cup of coffee." The fireworks were set for the evening, just before dark, and continued, "together with the firing of guns from the Akabeh and two or more gunboats, every quarter of an hour, during the night."

The best fireworks, however, were kept till morning and displayed during the cutting of the dam, which took place just before sunrise: "A great number of workmen begin to cut the dam. This labour devolves in alternate years upon the Muslim grave-diggers and on the Jews, and on a Saturday, they are under the necessity of paying a handsome sum of money to escape the sin of profaning their Sabbath by doing what the government requires of them.

"With a kind of hoe the dam is cut thinner and thinner from the back... until at the top it remains about a foot thick." Shortly before the beginning of the operation the governor of Cairo would arrive, accompanied by a state official and a judge, who drew up the document attesting that the waters had risen enough to warrant the cutting of the dam, and that this operation had been duly performed. This document was dispatched speedily to Istanbul.

The cutting of the dam would continue, meanwhile, as guns were fired the best fireworks, hardly visible in full daylight, exploded in the morning sky. When the dam was cut, the governor would throw a purse of gold coins to the labourers. "A boat, on board of which is an officer of the late Walee, is then propelled against the narrow ridge of earth, and, breaking the slight barrier, passes through it and descends with the cataract thus formed... The remains of the dam are quickly washed away by the influx of the water into the bed of the Canal, and numerous other boats enter, pass along the Canal throughout the whole length of the city, and some of them several miles further, and return."

When the festivities reached this climax, money was thrown into the Canal, and many of those who plunged to retrieve the coins lost their lives. In the year of this account, Lane states that he knew of three persons who died in this way on the day of the opening of the Canal. "One in the Canal itself, and two in the lake of the Ezbekeeyeh: A few minutes after I had entered my house on my return from witnessing the cutting of the dam and the festivities of the preceding night... a woman having part of her dress and her face, which was uncovered, besmeared with mud passed by my door, screaming for the loss of her son, who was one of the three persons drowned on this occasion."

The flooding of Cairo

Water entered the Ezbekiya Gardens through a newly dug canal on the day preceding the cutting of the dam. Crowds collected around the area and remained there for several days "to enjoy the view of a large expanse of water, which though very turpid, is refreshing to the sight in so dry and dusty a place as Cairo, and at this hot season of the year."

For several days, people came to the new lake in the evening, some remaining all night. Storytellers enlivened the long evenings, while men and boys "but also some young girls and even women" bathed in the lake at all times of the day and night.

Waiting for the flood

"On the day of the 'Saleeb' (or the discovery of the Cross)," writes Lane, "which is the 17th of the Coptic month of Toot, or 26th or 27th of September, at which period the river has risen to its greatest height or nearly so, [the Munadee] comes again to each house in his district," and, having recited the traditional formula for the occasion, "presents a few limes and other fruit to the rich or persons of middle rank and some lumps of dry mud of the Nile which is eaten by the women in many families. He generally receives a present of two or three or more piasters. His occupation then ceases until the next year."



Repairing the Nile dam; Bonaparte is watching at the right (Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*); Chephren and the Sphinx — by the Nile (*The Description of Egypt in Pictures: Rare Photographs 1850-1890*, Cairo, 1993)

A trip through time

History is brought to life at the Pharaonic Village, a worthwhile weekend excursion for the whole family. **Hanan Sabra** reports on attractions and reactions

The replica Tomb of Tutankhamun is one of the main attractions in the Pharaonic Village

photos: Sherif Sonbol

The Pharaonic Village, on an island off Giza just south of Cairo, has existed for two decades, but never before has it known such popularity. Families go there over weekends, and an increasing number of tourists has begun to appear as more historical attractions have been added in recent years.

Other than poring over heavy tomes written in an oppressive style, there are two ways to get an idea of life in Ancient Egypt. One is to go to the Tombs of the Nobles at Saqqara or other ruins to see the remarkably well-preserved reliefs of the ancients' activities. The other is to go to the Pharaonic Village and see those same activities brought to life. There are no professional actors here: the island's villagers are the actors and actresses. They dress like the ancients and re-enact the activities depicted on Ancient Egyptian tomb walls.

Hassan Ragab based his vision of the Pharaonic Village on the observation that village life in various rural communities in Egypt today seems little different from what it was thousands of years ago. He chose a site off the district of Giza where some 300 Egyptian farmers were leading lives similar to those of their forebears and turned it into an impressive living monument to one of the world's great civilisations.

Ragab first came to Jacob Island 20 years ago to grow papyrus, in order to revive the ancient Egyptian papyrus industry and use the papyrus paper for paintings to be sold to tourists. He soon realised that the 150,000-square-metre area could be exploited for another purpose as well, and the idea was born.

Ragab started by working out a blueprint for the site. The next step was to plant some 5,000 trees on the periphery of the village to shelter it from the anachronism of modern high-rise buildings across the Nile from an ancient Pharaonic village. Ragab then worked with the farmers on how to act as the ancients used to, which he says came naturally to them since they were themselves villagers living in a traditional way. Finally, he began construction of the elaborate setting and has been improving the village ever since.

Visitors to the village start by taking a trip on what Ragab calls a "floating amphitheatre", which he sees as a sort of time machine. Visitors board a boat and drift by various sites duplicating Ancient Egypt that are explained by the tour guide.

The tour first takes us back to the "time of the gods". The boat creeps past large statues that portray the great gods of Ancient Egypt: Amon, the "king of the gods"; Thoth, the ibis-headed god of wisdom who measured time, invented hieroglyphic writing and possessed knowledge of divine law; Osiris, the king associated with the rebirth of the land after the annual flood; Set, who murdered his rival Osiris and scattered the parts of his body throughout the land; Isis, the devoted mother who collected the pieces of her son Osiris' body, brought him back to life and conceived Horus.

As the "floating amphitheatre" passes through the reeds and by these gods, the tale of Ancient Egypt is related in different languages at different times of day. This part of the tour ends as the boat comes upon the scene of baby Moses in a basket in the bulrushes of the Nile, where a member of the Pharaoh's family discovers the child and takes him to be brought up in the Egyptian royal family.

The tour then moves on to depict daily life in Ancient Egypt. "The village recreates a vivid picture of ancient life in Egypt," said Mona Omar, a visitor from Saudi Arabia. Lucio, an Italian, agreed: "We were able to get a glimpse of the past and see the nature of Egyptian life: how they organised their workers, carried out various tasks, and worked in the fields."

For instance, boat construction was an active industry because it was the only means of transport between Upper and Lower Egypt, and small papyrus boats were used for the transportation of crops and for hunting and fishing trips in marshy areas. "By visiting the village, we were able to see the actual construction of these craft, with their upturned prows and sterns," commented one visitor. The boats are built by tying bundles of dry papyrus stalks together. It is said that crocodiles, which infested the Nile in the Pharaonic period, would not attack papyrus boats.

In another scene along the way, fishermen in two boats hold a net between them, showing how the ancient Egyptians used to bring in their catch. Other industries such as brick-making, pottery-manufacture, painting, wall-carving, statuary, perfume manufacture, spinning and weaving to make linen, papyrus manufacture, and viticulture are all demonstrated. The tour shows that the ancient Egyptians carried out activities like ploughing, furrowing, sowing, irrigation, harvesting, threshing, winnowing and storing grain using the same tools used by peasants nowadays.

Many of the visitors were surprised to see the apiary exhibit. Most people do not realise that bee-keeping for the production of honey was an extremely important industry in ancient times. An ancient myth relates that when the god Re wept, his tears changed into honey-making bees.

The tour then passes a serene Pharaonic garden nestled next to the bee-hives, with a pond containing lotus and other aquatic plants commonly cultivated in ancient times.

Robin Stein, a German visitor, was particularly taken with scenes of pigeon towers. "These can be seen all over the countryside today," he said, "but I had not realised that they had such a long history." He added that he had learned that the Ancient Egyptians knew of the value of carrier pigeons in delivering messages. The excursion is not limited to the sites seen from the water, as there are several points at which visitors can disembark. One is at a replica of a traditional temple. We passed through an avenue of ram-headed sphinxes and approached the temple pylon, its two massive symmetrical towers and the main gate between them giving the appearance of a large fortification. The facade is decorated with banners hanging from wooden masts sunk in specially made recesses. The inside of the pylon is hollow and fitted with a staircase leading to the top.

Passing through the pylon's main gate, we found ourselves standing in the open court surrounded by a row of columns with papyrus capitals on one side, palm capitals on the second, and Hathor columns on the third. From there we proceeded into the hypo style hall, with its large stone columns arranged in four rows, the central rows higher than the others to allow for the insertion of clerestory windows.

The small rooms to the right of the hall are used as sacristies for keeping garments, jewellery, perfume, incense and cult objects necessary for religious ceremonies. The room to the left is used as a sacred library in which papyrus rolls containing religious script are kept.

An actor in the temple replica performed the part of a seated scribe working on a roll of papyrus spread across his knees. His profession was a respected one: he wrote official documents, making many copies to be distributed to various parts of Egypt. Behind the scribe were pigeon-holes in which the papyrus rolls were kept, rather like our present day archives.

Other highlights in the temple included a water-clock, a time-indicator invented by Ancient Egyptians. They used it to tell the time when the sky was cloudy and it was difficult to determine the time by the sun or stars. The Pharaonic Village's water-clock is a copy of one that dates from the reign of Amenhotop III in about 1360BC. On the ceiling of the temple sprawls an astrological chart showing the sky with the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

At the rear of the temple is its most holy object: the sacred barque on which the gods' statues were placed. It is made either from gold or wood overlaid with gold leaf and inlaid with semi-precious stones.

Daily activities in Ancient Egypt are brought back to life

James Edward, an American visitor, was fascinated by the demonstration on the art of mummification: "It is a procedure about which little is known, and it is of great interest," he reflected at the conclusion of the tour.

Ragab's island village is the other major highlight. Trees and shrubs prevalent in Ancient Egypt, such as the doum palm, acacia, pomegranate, sycamore fig, olive tree, henna, jujube tree, tamarisk, date palm, common fig tree, white mulberry, weeping willow, vine and many others have all been grown in the village. There is also a nobleman's villa comprising several rooms, one for the man, another for his wife, others for the servants, as well as a bathroom, a kitchen, a portico, a drawing room, a living room, a dining room and a storeroom. On emerging from the back of the villa, we find ourselves in one of the narrow streets of the village, where a market-place displays a wide array of items for sale: vegetables, cereals, pots, plates, kitchen utensils and cloth. As money was not used in Pharaonic times, trade was carried out through barter.

Peasants' houses are not neglected at the village. These were simple affairs consisting of a single room in which the whole family slept and a front yard bounded by a rush fence where female members of the family carried out their daily chores. In the backyard of the house can be seen silos for grain and the barn to house the animals.

Egyptian or foreigner, young or old, the Pharaonic Village presents a fascinating trip through time. The Village shows us the continuity of Egyptian civilisation to the present, and with the wealth of information it presents in a creative way, it brings ancient history to life in a way that is both fun and edifying.

Airport overhaul

TABA International Airport has renovated its arrival and departure terminals to accommodate the influx of travellers expected from charter flights. Both halls have been completely restructured and upgraded with granite flooring, ceilings with inset lighting, and a new facade with double-glazing.

In addition, a new terminal, currently under construction, should be ready by 1998. Already tour operators have been encouraged, and are also looking seriously at the airport because of its proximity to Nuweiba. Flights between Cairo and Taba are scheduled on Mondays.

Open-air museums

FOUR historic areas have recently been chosen as potential sites for open-air museums: Salah El-Din's Citadel, Fatimid Cairo, the Islamic area in Rosetta, and ancient Foah city in Kafr El-Sheikh Governorate. Financed by Spain and Austria, the project is part of a Euro-Middle East partnership to promote historical and cultural tourism.

The first phase of the project will select areas of historical significance, and in the second, joint promotional programmes will be arranged for sites containing monuments of the same era.

Statues clean-up

THE CAIRO Governorate Tourist Committee has decided to clean and upgrade the area of Mataria, which includes both the Tree of the Virgin and the Obelisk of Senusert I, as well as remove obstructions to access routes.

In addition, the statues of historical figures in Cairo squares, such as Talaat Harb and Mohamed Farid, will be cleaned and the surrounding squares and streets will also be upgraded.

Hors-d'oeuvre

A NEW 'kitchen school' has been established in Nuweiba to give 20 would-be chefs training in such subjects as hygiene, the presentation of food and nutrition.

A mid-course exam was recently held to evaluate the abilities of the trainees, and Nuweiba food and beverage managers were invited to judge. Six hours were allowed for the cooking and presentation of a three-course meal and the results were 'impressive.'

Going green

STUTTGART University students have been studying the composition of hotel garbage in Sharm El-Sheikh in order to help solve the problem of solid waste. The students analysed the organic potential of kitchen and household waste, which constitutes more than half of all hotel garbage. Many establishments in Sinai have now switched from paper cups and bags to plastic ones, which are more suitable for recycling. European tour operators are also keen to be involved in such environmental issues.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.
Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions.
Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. Prices are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

New City Travel is offering trips to Paris, London, Damascus and Beirut. Trips to Paris go for LE1890 for 8 days including accommodation on breakfast basis. Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE3990 including accommodation in three-star hotels including open buffet breakfast. A week trip to Damascus and Beirut costs LE2090. The price includes accommodation in four-star hotels on breakfast basis.

Hotels

Cairo

Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.
Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

South Sinai

Sharm El-Sheikh

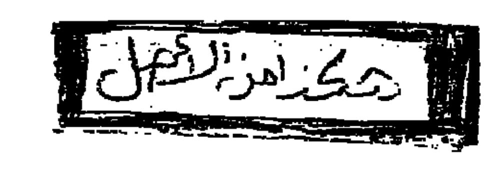
Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.
Coral Bay Resort is offering a rate of LE120 per person for double rooms and is also offering a rate of LE700 for 7 nights including breakfast. Prices are valid until September.

Dahab
Novotel Dahab is offering a rate of LE200 per person for double rooms for three days including breakfast buffet. The offer is valid until September 1997.

Red Sea

Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**





Ismaili clinches Cup matches

Egyptian hopes are pinned on local team Ismaili in the Arab Club Winners Cup, currently under way in Ismailia. **Abeer Anwar** reports

The Arab Club Winners Cup, a meeting of eight national cup-winning Arab teams, kicked off last Friday in Ismailia. Hosts Egypt are represented by the much-loved Ismaili, known to their fans as the Dervishes.

Othman Al-Saad, secretary-general of the Arab Football Federation, set an amount of $140,000 as total prize money for the championship. The winning team will take $50,000, the runners up $30,000 and the third and fourth will each win $20,000. The remaining four teams will be given $5,000 each.

The championship started well for Ismaili supporters with a 3-0 win for the local team — although they clearly can't afford to rest on their laurels. Ismaili, supervised by Argentinian coach Angel Markos, was facing Libya's Ahli. Ismaili appeared hesitant and disorganised. This was probably because the team contains a number of new faces replacing old stars who have left to join other clubs. Nevertheless, with the young players' energy and Markos' talent for making key changes at just the right time, they were able to score a decisive victory. "I *have had to depend on young players*, but they were up to the challenge and full of enthusiasm. They've brought new blood to the team," commented Markos after the game.

Ismaili's three goal scorers were: Hamza El-Gamal, nicknamed 'the prince', Mohamed Salah Abu Gerisha, and Mohamed Barakat. Barakat is only 16 years-old and his goal, scored just five minutes into the second half, was a great achievement for the young player. El-Gamal's immensely powerful kicks also caused quite a stir during the match. When one of his attempts at goal caught the goalpost, it hit the post so hard that it shook and appeared for a few seconds to be in danger of toppling over onto the Ahli goalkeeper. Needless to say, the Ismaili fans were delighted.

If Ismaili were sometimes lacking in organisation, they were nothing compared to Libya's Ahli, a team in total disarray. Unable to reach Ismaili's goal, they did not even manage any real attempts at the goal.

In the second match, Qatar's Al-Ittihad beat Palestine's Belata 5-2 in a game with no surprises. Belata is an inexperienced team and had attended the championship primarily to gain international experience.

On the second day of the championship, Saudi Arabia's Al-Shabab were pitched against Jordan's Al-Wahadat. The Saudis, who have a Brazilian coach and three Brazilian players, managed to trounce Al-Wahdat 3-1. Al-Shabab are considered one of the strongest teams in this championship and they lived up to their reputation in this match. They look set to make it through to the finals, and experts predict a rough ride for Ismaili if the final turns out to be an Egypt-Saudi clash.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Al-Arab came from behind to beat Algeria's Mouloudia 3-2. The Algerians finished the first half two goals ahead, but Al-Arab managed to get themselves together, reorganise and score three goals in the second half to garner a narrow win.

Sunday was a rest day for all the teams. For the visitors, there was a sightseeing tour around Ismailia. For Ismaili players and fans, it was a chance to relax and watch the Egypt-Liberia match.

On Monday, Qatar's Al-Ittihad beat Libya's Ahli 2-1. Ittihad controlled the match from the beginning, with Ismail Ali scoring the first goal for Ittihad in the 21st minute of the first half. Ahli reorganised their line-up in the second *half, allowing Gaber Saleh to score his* team's only goal in the 17th minute. But Ittihad's dominance was reasserted when Moussa Nadawu scored the Qataris' second goal in the 20th minute of the second half.

"We had better chances and our players were more prepared," commented Gamal Hegi, Qatar's Bosnian coach, after the match. "I am happy with the players' performance, but we will push more from the midfield in future."

In Monday's second match, Ismaili routed Palestine's Belata 5-0. The Palestinians fought well in the first half, managing to end with a scoreless draw. But Ismaili found their form in the second half, scoring five successive goals and putting the Palestinians firmly in their place.

Mohamed Homos scored the first goal only two minutes into the second half. He was followed by Ihab Galal in the 22nd minute and then it was the turn of Mohamed Abdel-Raouf, who scored a hat-trick with three consecutive goals — in the 27th, 40th and 43rd minute. He began scoring three minutes after he stepped into the pitch after being sidelined for a year because of injury — quite a comeback.

Angel Markos, Egypt's *technical* manager, could not fail to be delighted with the result. "The Palestinians were better in this match than the last one, but physical fitness was on our side," he said.



Ismaili's Ihab Galal struggling against an opponent for the ball — *photo: Ahmed Abdel-Raziq*

The avengers

The national team have pulled off another stunning victory — this time a 5-0 win against Liberia in the World Cup qualifiers. But, as **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports, it has come too late for World Cup qualification

The need for revenge lay heavy on the shoulders of the national soccer team as they set out for the second leg of their World Cup qualifying match against Liberia. Memories of the ignoble defeat in the first leg were still fresh.

Victory in this match was also important to national team coach Mahmoud El-Gohari. He was recruited last March after an unfortunate streak of defeats under previous coach Farouq Gafar. Gafar eventually resigned and was replaced by El-Gohari, who wanted to prove that, given enough time, Egypt *could win under his leadership*. Gohary has certainly proved that the team is capable of victory, but it has all come too late. There is no chance now of Egypt qualifying for the World Cup.

Sunday's match was characterised by cooperation, coordination, team play, and a high level of skill from the Egyptian team, which included tough and experienced players like Hadi Khashaba, Hisham Hanafi, and Hazem Imam.

Egypt controlled the field most of the time, with the exception of some momentary lapses in concentration. In contrast to the first leg match against Liberia, the team was not afraid of Liberia's George Weah, who scored Liberia's victory goal in the first leg match in April.

The match started quietly, with players and the thin crowd of spectators keeping a close eye on Weah. But the pace soon picked up as the Egyptian side decided to take the initiative and attack. After that, nothing could stop Egypt. There were countless attempts on the Liberian goal, until Hadi Khashaba scored the first *goal from a 20th minute penalty. Morale seemed to improve by the* minute, and the team put on a show of amazingly skilful passes. That skill paid off when Hisham Hanafi scored the second goal in the 24th minute.

Realising what was happening, Liberia went on the attack — unsuccessfully. Their several attempts at goal were lead by Weah. The other players looked exhausted. When Egypt got control again there were three more attempts at the Liberian goal, none of them successful, before the end of the first half.

Before the Liberians had time to blink in the second half, Egypt had scored again. This time Ahmed Hassan made a quick and easy pass to Abdel-Sattar Sabri who made the most of the opportunity and shot the ball straight into the back of the net. Then Weah led more Liberian attacks, but Egypt's goalkeeper Nader El-Sayed was on the ball every time. In the 23rd minute, Samir Kammuna scored Egypt's fourth goal, and two minutes later, Hazem Imam made the fifth and final kick into the net. Not satisfied with five goals, the Egyptians continued their attacks up until the moment that the referee's whistle *announced the end of the match*.

This was a grudge match, pure and simple. Whatever the margin of victory, Egypt had already lost all chance of qualifying for the World Cup. In its group, which comprised Tunisia, Egypt, Liberia and Namibia, the Egyptians were defeated by Tunisia 0-1 in the first leg match and played a scoreless draw in the second leg. With Namibia, Egypt scored a 3-2 victory in the first leg match and another 7-1 victory in the second leg match. Tunisia qualified from this group.

Other African teams which will be travelling to France for next year's World Cup are Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa and Morocco.

Barada's gold

EGYPT's Ahmed Barada, ranked six in the world, defeated Ireland's Derrick Rayan 3-0 (9-4, 9-3, 9-4) last Sunday in the squash final at the World Games in Finland, reports **Eman Abdel-Moeti**.

Barada had been the second favourite to win the competition after Pakistan's Jansher Khan. But Khan's last-minute withdrawal left the way clear for Barada to collect the gold medal. Barada dedicated his medal to President Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian people, who, he said, were the reason for his success in the tough world of professional squash.

Officials, amazed by Barada's strength and stamina, suspected that he was on steroids, but tests taken before he received his medal proved negative. Fans had hoped for a Barada-Jansher clash in the final, and were disappointed when Jansher was forced to leave the competition because of sickness.

Competitors all complained of lack of organisation at the Games, particularly the fact that they did not receive their match schedules until the last minute.

Making a comeback

Never say never again is the message of two of Egypt's Pan-Arab gold medalists. **Inas Mazhar** spoke to the sportsmen who came out of retirement to win again

Thirty-three-year-old businessman Khaled Thabet retired from the sport of shooting two years ago to concentrate on his career. His days as a competitor on the shooting range seemed to belong to the past, until a call from the Egyptian Shooting Federation asked him to return to the sport for the Pan-Arab Games in Beirut.

Thabet agreed, practised hard, and took part in the Egyptian Arab Championships two weeks beforehand. He came fourth in that championship, setting a new Egyptian record and, he says, getting lots of experience in preparation for Beirut.

He proceeded to overpower all his opponents in the Games, including teammate Mustafa Hamdi, who had taken first place in the Arab Championships. Thabet scored *144/150* to win the gold medal in the skeet event. His Pan-Arab gold has been added to a collection which includes gold medals from the 1988 Arab Championship and the All Africa Games, as well as a silver medal from the World Cup in Egypt.

"I wanted my comeback to be in Beirut, because all the top Arab marksmen would be there. I made it, and I am happy and proud of my achievement," Thabet said.

Having tasted the thrill of competition again, Thabet does not want to return to retirement. "I will not think about retirement any more — either now or in the near future. In fact, this medal has increased my appetite for more competition and more medals. My goal now is to win the gold at the upcoming Arab Championship in Syria from 4-14 October, then the African Championship in Johannesburg from 24-30 of the same month," he said.

His ambition stretches beyond even the African and Arab championships. Five world cups are held every year, and Thabet wants to be there — on the winner's rostrum of course. But there are problems. "The only way we can participate in the world cups is if the federation sends us, but unfortunately its budget is too small and it can only send us to one of the five. This is not enough to allow the marksmen to train and improve."

While Thabet was winning medals on the shooting range, there was a tough competition under way in the under-68kg judo event, culminating in a hard-fought final between Tunisia's Iskander Hashisha and Egypt's Khaled Hegazi. Both players had to employ all their strength and skill — it was the most difficult clash of the whole Pan-Arab judo competition, and it ended with Hegazi flooring his opponent and winning the gold for Egypt.

"I was very nervous and tense before the match," Hegazi recalled. "My opponent was not easy. He is the African champion, the Mediterranean Games gold *medalist, and was silver medalist* in the Cherokee Cup in Japan — one of world judo's major competitions. Not only that, but I had spent the last two years in retirement. But I wanted to prove to myself that I was still in good shape and prove to the federation officials that they had made the right decision in asking me to come back."

He still finds it hard to believe that he has beaten the four-times African champion after being away from competition for two years. "It was unbelievable. I felt near to tears throughout the match. I wasn't concentrating completely, although I tried to because I knew I had to win. I think I was concentrating more on beating myself and my own psyche rather than my opponent. I would like to meet Hashisha again and snatch his African title, and I think I will have the chance in the World Championship in France next October."

Like Thabet, the 28-year-old Hegazi is not considering returning to retirement. "There is no reason why I should retire," he said. "I only did it before because of work. I am a marine engineer, and after graduation I was working at sea for three years, so it was impossible for me to train. But now I am taking a break from my work for the sake of judo. Months of hard training have got me back into shape and my *coaches tell me I'm* at the top of my form."

For Hegazi, the break from his career has been worth the sacrifice. He is looking forward to more national, regional and international championships, and, he hopes, more medals.



Yomna Tarif El-Kholi:

Two decades, watching life. Now she can live it, too

Breaking the silence

Why devote a profile to Yomna El-Kholi, even if she is a distinguished professor of philosophy who has published seven books, translated many works, been awarded for her work throughout the Arab world, and written a plethora of articles and essays? She is active, certainly, but so are many women. The difference is clear, however, because, for Yomna, the obstacles in any career woman's path have been compounded by her isolation from the world. For 22 years, Yomna El-Kholi was deaf.

Childhood was a happy time for the granddaughter of Sheikh Amin El-Kholi, a pioneer of the Egyptian enlightenment. Books were Yomna's passion for as long as she can remember. All her pocket money was spent on children's books. Her father encouraged this obsession: he saw books as a whole world, "which gives richness and value to human beings". Yomna started reading philosophy, which her father had described as the highest and broadest form of knowledge — the key to learning — when she was only 15.

While still in her early teens, she had a very clear vision of her future. Top of her class throughout school, she chose to study philosophy despite grades that could have opened the door to a coveted place at the Faculty of Medicine. Her thirst for knowledge was unquenchable.

At the end of the first year at university, she was again top of her class. She had just received her prize when she was knocked down by a speeding car. She was rushed to hospital with concussion and several broken bones in her skull. For six hours the surgeons struggled to piece together her shattered skull. The surgery was successful, but her hearing was completely lost.

When she woke up in hospital, Yomna could not fathom the eerie situation around her. People were acting strangely — they moved their lips, gesticulated, and walked to and fro, but no sound came out. She immediately remembered reading as a child, how spies were photographed with hidden cameras and experts were brought in to decipher their conversation from the movements of their lips. That had been fantasy at the time, but now, suddenly and without preamble, she started doing just that. She started lip-reading and became quite adept at it.

Hatem, her childhood sweetheart, comforted and helped her in every way he could. When she was discharged from hospital, they became officially engaged. This fidelity gave Yomna a deep sense of security that has lived with her to this day. A few months after the accident, her father took her to the UK for further treatment. There she underwent several operations to restore her impaired hearing, but was disappointed time and time again. What was worse than her lack of hearing was the constant buzzing in her ears, which increased after every operation. At the end of her treatment in the UK, the doctors announced that nothing further could be done: she would never hear again. She must accept her fate and live accordingly. Yomna may have teetered on the brink of despair at this point, but she never let on. Today, you feel only her energy, her desire to return home and begin thinking of all the projects she wanted to undertake. Did she ever contemplate the possibility that she would fail? The thought does not seem to have occurred to her.

While she was undergoing treatment in the UK, Hatem (by then a graduate, running his own business and master of his own time), and her sister and brother took turns attending her lectures and taking notes. When she came back, five months later, Yomna studied their meticulous records and, contrary to her teachers advice, took on a new challenge and sat for her end-of-year exams. The projects that were brewing in her mind could not be postponed. Again, she passed with honours.

Although she believed that her appointment as a member of the faculty would go through automatically, she was surprised to be confronted with a barrage of obstacles, all related to her deafness. She was not cowered, and retaliated with equal force. Challenged with such arguments as "we have no quota for the handicapped," her immediate retort was: "That is certainly a strange statement, considering that Taha Hussein was the first dean of Cairo University."

The strongest arguments against her appointment revolved around the fact that she would not be able to control the students during her lectures. Only one professor gave her the chance to refute this allegation. He suggested that staff members attend her lectures and that both students and staff be allowed to assess her teaching. The result was exactly the opposite of their misgivings. The students were so happy with her interpretation and simplification of the dilemmas with which she presented them that they sent a written request to the head of the department demanding that she be allowed to stay on. One professor expressed the dire prediction that "she will not only change the system, but cause a rebellion. It will establish a precedent for students to impose their will on the administration."

Yomna sat for her Masters' Degree, writing her thesis on "The Philosophy of Science: Differentiating between Science and Pseudoscience". Far from taking off on a well-deserved holiday after graduating, she spent all her time either at home or at the library preparing for her PhD — the youngest student in the Faculty of Arts to receive it. This time, she wrote a thesis on "Principles of Determinism in Contemporary Science and the Problems of Science: Methodology of Philosophy."

Having specialised in the philosophy of science, Yomna was appointed to teach a new subject: "The Core of Modernity". She still loves the eager faces looking up to her in lectures, and beams when she says: "The only joy that excels teaching is supervising theses."

In 1985, Yomna was ready to begin attending conferences, travelling abroad and giving lectures. She had become so proficient at lip-reading that many of the people she now met did not realise that she could not hear a word they said. The books she has written cover subjects ranging from Karl Popper to mathematical logic, from Arab and Muslim scientists to the application of scientific methods to the social sciences. Her writing is difficult and at times tiresome. She does not honestly know whether to be proud or bothered by the fact that only academics understand her books, but Hatem cheers her up: "This is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage. This is you."

Yomna's exposure to Western culture at a young age gave her early insight into the wonders of modern science. She holds the technological progress of the West in great esteem, but remains a nationalist — according to her own definition. Nationality to Yomna is a feeling that cannot be dismissed through facile identification with the global village. "The West is free to adopt this concept, but it certainly does not apply to the Arab world. At the same time, in spite of the fact that the West has defined the present as an age of conglomeration, this allegation does not really hold true: it is still divided into several identities, each enjoying a different language, culture, traditions. With the Arabs, the case is completely different. Arabs share a common language, culture, religion, traditions, history. Arab nationality is a truism, it is not an abstraction." She defines Arab nationalism as "oh... Um Kalthoum, Salah Jahin, Ibn Rushd, Mahmoud Darwish, Adawiya, Fayrouz. It is *fuul medammes, kubeiba, couscous, zagharit*... — and no pacts, wars or disagreements can alter this fact. Arab nationalism is our anchor to security and our weapon against disintegration. It is the shield that protects us from being crushed by Western civilisation and the loss of our culture and identity."

Has Yomna El-Kholi overcome deafness? Articulate, bright, she has chosen the profession of the communicator par excellence. But her successes only increased the impact of her affliction. "Deafness is an inconceivable cruelty. For example, at night, to know whether my children were crying, I would put my hand on them to feel the tremour of their tiny bodies. The total absence of sound, even a heartbeat, is agony above human imagination." Helen Keller is reported to have said: "If I am given the alternative of hearing or seeing, I would definitely choose hearing. I want to live life, not just see it."

After 22 years of complete deafness and experiments with the range of treatments, from hearing aids (she has a drawer full of different types) to acupuncture and psychiatry, Yomna and Hatem heard about a very delicate and difficult operation that had been carried out successfully in the US — the cochlear implant. This raised their hopes, especially after they discovered that Yomna's otic nerves were not damaged. Some doctors warned her against travelling to the US to undergo such a major operation. They claimed that the benefits of its success would be "a mere perception of voice", while its failure would result in hemiplegia, loss of the faculty of movement and stiffness of the head. Yomna, as usual, was undaunted.

"I was ready to risk and sacrifice everything in the world — except my family and my books — to enjoy even a 'mere perception of voice'." The operation was 99.9 per cent successful. One part of the device is implanted under the skin behind the ear, while a plastic instrument is concealed under her hair, attached to a specially programmed computer that transfers sound into electric waves. Yomna now wears either a veil or a hat, not out of vanity, but to avoid damaging or losing her precious implant.

At conferences and cultural events, you can always see her, perched on the very edge of her chair, completely absorbed, intent on grasping every word being said, fidgeting and mouthing her approval or disapproval. Her comments are never short, reflecting her refusal to perceive anything as absolutely correct, or completely false.

At a reception given in her honour upon her return from the US, she asked her host whether poet Farouk Shousha would recite one of his works. Shousha obliged, and her tearful expression and excitement at hearing his voice for the first time were a thrilling, painful sight. "Now I thank God for every sound, vibration and tune I hear. I feel as though the manacles that bound me for so many years are suddenly broken. I can appreciate music, listen to the radio and talk on the telephone (with a special adapter). I can enjoy so many, many things. I wonder: how did I bear this 'deafening' silence for 22 years? How did I have the courage to mix with people, give lectures, and take part in discussions, debates and arguments, simply relying on lip-reading? The wonders of science are never to be underestimated."

Profile by **Samia Abdennour**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ My dears, what a flurry of summer weddings! I had no idea, long ago, that my pioneering move to marry in the heat of the moment would continue to inspire young lovers to this day. While some of my more resolutely single colleagues have described the trend as mass suicide, I look upon these occasions as an excuse to display some of my finer concoctions. Plumes having passed, I have made a rapid return to power shoulders, so flattering with the plunging necklines I continue to favour.

The first event at which I had the chance to dazzle friends and fans was the splendid wedding of our humble publication's own **Injy El-Kashef**, who was wed in the grandest style to her dashing beau, **Mohamed El-Assiouty**. The bride, resplendent in a lavish *guipure* gown, positively glowed. In fact, had I not been so carried away by emotion, I would have been slightly miffed at being outshone on every count. Held at the Diplomatic Club, long one of my favourite haunts, the wedding was a fairly intimate affair — all the more reason for friends and family to have the best of times on the dance floor, where they gathered around the happy couple for hours of fun. Then **Injy** and **Assiouty** were off to a romantic sea-side spot, the exact identity of which I shall refrain from revealing, for a honeymoon which was, judging from **Injy**'s blissful expression upon her return, no less than idyllic.



Blushing brides, glowing grooms: Hanan and Sameh, Jailan and Essam, Injy and Assiouty all pause on the threshold of a new life

One of the most splendid occasions of this lavish summer crop was surely the double wedding of *Al-Weekly* reporter **Jailan Halawi** and her sister, *Al-Ahram* reporter **Hanan**, to **Essam** and **Sameh Abdel-Aziz El-Safti**. Now I love weddings, and a double bill is the stuff my dreams are made of. **Jailan** and **Hanan**, the lovely daughters of Al-Ahram's financial manager, **Hassan Halawi**, were resplendent in lace gowns, while the grooms — **Essam**, a handsome associate professor of French literature at St Thomas University in New Brunswick, and **Sameh**, a fun-loving expert in international law (just going to prove, dears, that this is not a contradiction in terms) who works at the French Ministry of Interior — beamed throughout the festivities. **Jailan**'s dress purportedly weighed sixty kilogrammes, although her proud bearing did not betray the burden. The Ahram family turned out in force, of course, first among them **Ibrahim Nafie** himself, chairman of Al-Ahram Organisation and editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* newspaper, who congratulated the brides and grooms warmly. The guests were then entertained by **Samir Sabri**, who really got things going, while even **Lucy**'s dancing was more sedate than usual. **Ihab Tawfik** and **Mohamed El-Ezabi** rounded off an altogether delightful evening.

